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THE ATTITUDE OF GOETHE AND SCHILLER TOWARD FRENCH CLASSIC DRAMA

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PREFACE

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THE ATTITUDE OF GOETHE AND SCHILLER TOWARD THE FRENCH CLASSIC DRAMA

INTRODUCTION

The eighteenth century in Germany witnessed the slow break-up of a literary despotism and the establishment of the principles of a literary democracy which stood for the right to expression of individual—as opposed to collective—experience in suitably flexible forms. Seventeenth century France had bequeathed to Germany, along with social and political ideals, the mistaken notion that there was a set of rules—nearly rigid—by which all literary production was to be regulated. The brilliant literature of the French classic period had impressed the Germans, prostrate as they were from the after-effects of the Thirty Years' War, and it was only natural that they should turn to the sister nation for guidance. For more than a century, Germany's literary men sought to assimilate the rules of French composition vainly hoping to bring forth a literature comparable to that of the French.

With the opening of the eighteenth century, however, a rival entered the field, which was destined to put French ideals to flight: this was the literature of England. While the French type represented, in general, the formal intellectual elements of literary composition, the English ideal emphasized thought and feeling. These two ideals fought for supremacy long and bitterly, first in the strife between Gottsched on the one hand, and Bodmer and Breitinger on the other, later between Gottsched and Lessing. With the publication in 1767 of Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, the battle came to be waged most hotly in and about the drama. It was a question of who best represented the spirit of the ancient theater and the theories of Aristotle; Corneille, Boileau, Racine, and Voltaire, or Shakespeare? Lessing laid about him so stoutly with his criticism of the French ideals that he routed them from their position of domination in German letters, and victory came to rest with the freer, more virile, and more profound spirit of English literature. This movement reached its conclusion in the Storm and Stress

upheaval, which was simply an attempt to picture forth a world then newly discovered to modern German literature—that of feeling. When once the Germans had found their bearings, they struck out for themselves to seek their own destiny, and it was no longer a question of the rule of either English or French taste in Germany.

In the throes of the Storm and Stress movement, both Goethe and Schiller were born to German letters. Unlike the lesser men of the same period, they recovered their balance and gained a point of view which blended the formal and rationalistic elements characteristic of the French literature and the emotional and contemplative traits of the English. The struggle, then, between form and content, between collective and individual experience culminated in them.

It is the province of this investigation, in the light of what has been said above, to inquire into their attitude toward the French classic drama. This I have attempted to do by a study of what they said directly of it, and by inquiring into their attitude toward dramatic principles in general which are hostile or friendly to those espoused by the French. The deeper and more subtle question of the indirect influence of French drama and dramaturgy upon their own literary practice, of which they said nothing—and of which they themselves were beyond a doubt largely unaware—I have no more than touched upon here and there: the adequate consideration of such a problem does not fall within the range of this investigation.

The discussion has been divided into five chapters: chapters one and three take up for Goethe and Schiller respectively their general attitude toward the French classic drama both in its theory and in its concrete form; chapters two and four deal with their estimate of the individual dramatists and their works; chapter five, the conclusion, compares the opinion of the two men and attempts to arrive at some general conclusions concerning their contributions to the history of human ideals.*

*As sources for this study, I have used for Goethe the Weimar ed., Weimar, 1887-1909 (in four sections: I. literary works; II. scientific; III. dairies; IV. letters), the revised ed. of conversations by Flodoard v.

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I

GOETHE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD FRENCH CLASSIC DRAMA IN GENERAL

Goethe's attitude toward the French classic drama is, at bottom, his attitude toward various kinds of art in general. Pseudo-classicist, realist, classicist, and romanticist as he was in turn, it is natural to expect in his development a varying appreciation of the drama of the classic period of French literature. The following periods, differing widely from each other as regards his estimate of the dramatic productions of this age, stand out in his life. (a) the Frankfurt-Leipzig period, 1759-1770; this was a time when French influence most dominated Goethe: (b) the Storm and Stress period, 1770-1775, which began with his residence in Strassburg and acquaintance with Herder, and in which he protested vigorously against hampering limitations of form: (c) the period of silence, 1775-1799, which had no definite boundaries, for it grew gradually out of period (b) and shaded into period (d). This period marked a decided allegiance to classic Greek ideals but in it Goethe did not express any direct, important criticism of the classic art of the French. (d) The period of truest appreciation of French classic drama, 1799-1832. This period opened in the midst of Goethe's activity as director of the Weimar stage where he was endeavoring to institute a reform of the German theater.

Frankfurt-Leipzig Period, 1759-1770. In these years, Goethe was completely under the influence of French ideals. This was very natural, for his native city of Frankfurt was a cosmopolitan center in Goethe's time. *Dichtung und Wahrheit* gives a good idea of the various influences at work on the unusually receptive lad. French ideals of culture were not strangers in this city. The French themselves, their language,

Biedermann, Leipzig, 1911, and the ed. of *Urmeister* by Maync, Stuttgart and Berlin, 1911; for Schiller, the hist.-critical ed. by Goedeke, Stuttgart, 1867-1876, the ed. of his letters by Jonas, Stuttgart, Leipzig, and Berlin, n. d., and of his conversations by Petersen, Leipzig, 1911. I have examined all their writings—including paralipomena and text-readings—except the purely scientific works of Goethe found in sec. II. of Weimar ed.

their literature, and their theater were early known to and loved by him. He spoke French with servants, with the French soldiers quartered at his father's house during the occupation of Frankfurt (1759-1763), and he visited assiduously the French plays given in 1759 by a French troupe accompanying the army.¹ His delight in the French theater became a passion that grew with every play he saw, although, returning late home to meals, he often had to content himself with what was left on the table and at the same time to meet the strong disapproval of his father who thought his attendance at the plays a waste of time.²

The foreign troupe played comedy much oftener than tragedy. Goethe says that he understood it poorly. That was undoubtedly because of the witticisms in a foreign tongue, the very intimate relation of comedy to the life from which it springs, the merely suggested situations, and the rapidity of the action. On the other hand, the measured movement, the regularity of accent of the alexandrines, and the use of more general expressions made tragedy much easier of comprehension. The repertory of the troupe contained pieces of such authors as Molière, Destouches, Marivaux, La Chaussée, and perhaps also of Voltaire.³ And while there is no direct evidence that the masterpieces of Corneille and Racine were attempted on the stage, it seems probable from the fact that the young Goethe—as will be seen later—took to reading these writers with zeal. He was much impressed with the *Hypermnestre* of Lemierre, a philosophic tragedy, not exactly of the traditional classic type, which was characterized by rapidity of action, considerable pathos, and a rather nervous style. Of all the pieces which he saw, however, the half-allegoric, half-mythological dramas in the style of Piron appealed to him most.⁴ The play stirred him to a wider acquaintance with French literature. He studied Racine and read his dramas

¹ *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, I. Teil, 3. Buch; Weimarer Ausgabe, Abteilung I, Bd. 26, 141f.

² *D. u. W.*, I, 3; *W.*, I, 26, 166.

³ *Ibid.*, 143; also Rossel, *Histoire des relations littéraires entre la France et l'Allemagne*, 532 (footnote).

⁴ *D. u. W.*, I, 3; *W.*, I, 26, 167.

aloud in true theatrical fashion with the greatest vivacity, although not always wholly understanding the words which he spoke. He even learned whole passages by heart and recited them.¹ And this when he was a lad of about twelve! He went so far as to try his hand at original composition in French. He tells in his autobiography how confidently he handed his first effort over to his companion, Derones, son of one of the members of the French company, for criticism. From him Goethe had heard so much of the three unities of Aristotle, of the regularity and symmetry of the French drama, of the probability of the situations, of the harmony of the verse, and of all that went along with these that he thought him a competent critic. "Er schalt auf die Engländer und verachtete die Deutschen; genug er trug mir die ganze dramaturgische Litanei vor, die ich in meinen Leben so oft musste wiederholen hören."²

By a merciless pulling to pieces and an arbitrary substitution of whole passages of his own, Derones completely disfigured Goethe's literary effort. Strange to say, this disappointment fanned rather than quenched the boy's enthusiasm. It aroused his interest in the matter of French dramaturgy. He read Corneille's treatise on the unities and the story of the quarrel over the *Cid*, but he became disgusted with the whole business. He then turned back with renewed interest to the presentation of the plays on the Frankfurt stage, and more zealously than ever he extended his reading knowledge of the French classics to include the whole of Racine and Molière, and a large part of Corneille. At this time, too, he, with other children of Frankfurt, gave a presentation of Racine's *Britannicus*, under the leadership of Schöff von Ohlenschläger. Goethe played the rôle of Nero and thoroughly enjoyed it.³ His enthusiasm for French literature now became so great at this time that he began a drama in French in the alexandrine meter.⁴

The stay in Leipzig, the "klein Paris," marked not a wan-

¹ D. u. W., I, 3; W., I, 26, 142.

² D. u. W., I, 3; W., I, 26, 169.

³ D. u. W., I, 3; W., I, 26, 170.

⁴ Bielschowsky, *Goethe, sein Leben und seine Werke*, 1, 88.

ing but an intensifying of interest in French drama. He read Boileau, the theorist of this movement, and felt that his own literary ideals owed much to him and that he would be a safe guide to follow in French literature.¹ Though forced to the study of jurisprudence, Goethe was drawn by his inclinations more and more to literature.² On October 10, 1766, the new Leipzig theater was opened and Goethe was present.³ This event undoubtedly gave a new impulse to dramatic interest in the Saxon city. It is very likely that the young man was a familiar figure at the playhouse.⁴ Its repertory was largely made up of French pieces—for Gottsched ruled the stage—from such dramatists as Corneille, Molière, Voltaire, Destouches⁵ and in all probability Racine. The result of this contact with French dramatic art was the composition by Goethe of dramas of such thoroughgoing French spirit as *Die Laune des Verliebten* and *Die Mitschuldigen*, both in alexandrines.* He felt French classic art to be the acme of human effort, its limitations in form as indispensable, and he coveted a clear comprehension of its fundamental principles by which to judge his own works.⁶ †

Even before the opening of the next period, however, Goethe had already begun to pull at the moorings of the

* Curiously, however, in his earlier drama, *Balsazar*, he looked rather to English than to French tragedy for his verse form. Letters to Riese, Oct. 30, 1765; and to Cornelia, Dec. 7, 1765; W., IV, 1, 17 and 24.

† It is noteworthy, that, in the famous seventh book of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*—the review of the literature contemporary with his younger years,—Goethe mentions French influence in Germany but once. He says that, as a result of the French tastes of Frederic the Great, a vast amount of French culture had come to Prussia, which had proved of negative value to the Germans by arousing them to oppose and offset it. D. u. W., II, 7; W., I, 27, 105f.

¹ Letter to Cornelia, May 28 and Sept. 27, 1766; W., IV, 1, 54 and 70.

² D. u. W., II, 6; W., I, 27, 50ff.

³ Sachs, *Goethes Beschäftigung mit französischer Sprache und Literatur*; Zs. f. fr. Spr. u. Lit., 23, 37.

⁴ Witkowski, *Goethe*, 40.

⁵ Sachs, 25, 37; letters to Cornelia, Oct. 13, Dec. 7, (reply to letter of Dec. 6), Dec. 23, 1765; W., IV, 1, pp. 9f, 24, 26, 28 and 32.

⁶ *Tag- und Jahreshefte*, 1764 bis 1769; W., I, 35, 3f.

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French classic ideals, and by the time of his convalescence in Frankfurt, the poems which he had composed in Leipzig appeared to him cold, formal, and extremely superficial in their portrayal of the workings of the human heart and mind.¹

Storm and Stress Period, 1770-1775. Because of his interest in things French, Goethe chose Strassburg, which was then in French territory, as the place to continue his university work.² The months spent in the Alsatian capital, however, marked a decided turning point in the spiritual development of the young man. So, too, for his estimate of the French classic drama it was the closing of the first period—the time when he was under the influence of French classicism—and the opening of the Storm and Stress epoch, when content and spirit, not form, took first place in his literary philosophy.

The result of his stay in Strassburg was the exact opposite of what he had anticipated.³ The acquaintance with Herder and through him with the world of feeling and throbbing life in Hebrew and folk poetry, Shakespeare,* Ossian, and Homer opened up to the young man, dissatisfied with erudition, new vistas of human experience and hence of the possibilities of literary art.⁴ In comparison, the French literature of the 18th century especially seemed artificial and restrained, and showed decided signs of decay⁵—qualities utterly uncongenial to a youthful love of fullness of life. The new ideas meant life and liberty. In the exuberance of revolt against monotony, conventionality, timorous restraint, galling shackles, and decrepitude, Goethe fairly hissed forth his contempt for the rash and puny Frenchman, the "Französchchen," who had dared to don the armor of the Greeks. The French had mis-

* Herder's attitude toward the Elizabethan is well set forth in his essay, *Shakespeare*, in *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (1773). This point of view undoubtedly helped to shape Goethe's Storm and Stress opinion of the Englishman.

¹ D. u. W., II, 8; W., I, 27, 216.

² Ibid, III, 11; W., I, 28, 50f.

³ D. u. W., III, 11; W., I, 28, 51.

⁴ D. u. W., II, 19; W., I, 27, 302-322; Bielschowsky, *Goethe*, I, 116f.

⁵ D. u. W., III, 11; W., I, 28, 57ff.

understood the spirit of Greek drama and they had based their dramatic literature upon this misinterpreted ancient drama. This was bad enough in itself, but when the Germans had blindly aped the French in this misunderstanding, dramatic art was indeed in a bad way. Almost nothing short of a new creation would dispel the chaotic darkness of perverted taste. Passages from a speech which Goethe delivered on Shakespeare's Day, October 14, 1771, in Frankfurt, in eulogy of the great Elizabethan, will best give an idea of his attitude—and incidentally of the exaggerated style of the "Geniezeit:"¹

"Ich zweifelte keinen Augenblick dem regelmässigen Theater zu entsagen. Es schien mir die Einheit des Orts so kerckermässig ängstlich, die Einheiten der Handlung und der Zeit lästige Fesseln unsrer Einbildungskraft. Ich sprang in die freye Luft, und fühlte erst dass ich Hände und Füsse hatte. Und ietzo da ich sahe, wieviel Unrecht mir die Herrn der Regel in ihrem Loch angethan haben, wie viel freye Seelen noch drinne sich krümmen, so wäre mir mein Herz geborsten, wenn ich ihnen nicht Fehde angekündigt hätte, und nicht täglich suchte ihre Türne zusammen zu schlagen.

"Das griechische Theater, das die Franzosen zum Muster nahmen, war, nach innrer und äusserer Beschaffenheit, so, dass eher ein Marquis den Alcibiades nachahmen könnte, als es Corneillen dem Sophokles zu folgen möglich wär.

"Erst Intermezzo des Gottesdiensts, dann feyerlich politisch, zeigte das Trauerspiel einzelne grose Handlungen der Väter, dem Volck, mit der reinen Einfalt der Vollkommenheit, erregte ganze grose Empfindungen in den Seelen, denn es war selbst ganz und gros.

"Und in was für Seelen!

"Griechischen! . . .

"Nun sag ich geschwind hinten drein: Französgen, was willst du mit der griechischen Rüstung, sie ist dir zu gros und zu schwer.

"Drum sind alle Französche Trauerspiele Parodien von sich selbst.

¹Zum Shakespeares Tag; Oct. 14, 1771; W., I, 37, 131-135. (I have followed the spelling and punctuation of the critical editions of the works of Goethe and Schiller throughout.)

“Wie das so regelmässig zugeht, und dass sie einander ähnlich sind wie Schue, und auch langweilig mit unter, besonders *in genere* im vierten Act das wissen die Herren leider aus der Erfahrung und ich sage nichts davon.”

Then follows in exaggerated language praise of Shakespeare, great because of his conception of tragic situation and of his fidelity to nature. At the end is this fanfare to Goethe's deluded countrymen:

“Auf, meine Herren! trompeten Sie mir alle edle Seelen, aus dem Elysium, des sogenannten guten Geschmacks, wo sie schlaftrunken, in langweiliger Dämmerung halb sind, halb nicht sind, Leidenschafften im Herzen und kein Marck in den Knochen haben, und weil sie nicht müde genug zu ruhen und doch zu faul sind um tätig zu seyn, ihr Schatten Leben zwischen Myrten und Lorbeergebüschen verschlendern und vergähnen.”

Goethe expressed to Salzmann the need of finding a literary *genre* between the heavy pieces of Gottsched and the horseplay in the pieces of the Hanswurst type. In this spirit he wrote such realistic and defiantly unconventional works as *Götz*, the *Urfaust*, and the dramatic satires *Das Jahrmaktsfest zu Plundersweilern*—a travesty on the French classic drama,¹—*Satyros*, *Pater Brey*, and *Prometheus*.²

Toward the close of this period, however, his feeling toward the classic dramatic art of France had veered several points from the direction which it had taken at its opening. To be sure, he still expressed impatience with the dramatic critics for their continued insistence upon the circumspect observance of form—of length, of unities, and of similar matters—in a literary product. This opinion that almost anyone could bring forth a piece of literature by conscientiously exercising himself in certain mechanical rules, he vigorously repudiated.³ In common with the other leaders of the Storm and Stress movement, he believed that the true artist was he in whom the “Genius” dwelt as a living presence and through whom it

¹ Köster, *Schiller als Dramaturg*, 246.

² Letter to Salzmann, Mar. 6, 1773; W., IV, 2, 66.

³ Aus Goethes Brieftasche; Mercier-Wagner, *Neuer Versuch über die Schauspielkunst*, ca. 1775; W., I, 37, 313 f.

spoke. Nevertheless, his radicalism of four years before had moderated enough to allow form a place in his literary philosophy. It still appealed to him as something unnatural in and of itself but necessary as a burning glass to focus the divine rays from the broad expanse of nature into the heart of man.¹

In retrospect, the Goethe of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* dated this change earlier and saw in the beginnings of a drama on the subject of Mahomet,* if not a return to French classicism, at least a tendency to reapproach the regular form to which he was attracted anew.² Minor, however, thinks that when Goethe wrote this passage he was looking through his experience as a translator of Voltaire and therefore very easily came to ascribe to his own earlier plan the regularity of the French drama.^{3†}

Period of Silence, 1775-1799. These dates set off a time in Goethe's life during which, with a single exception ‡ he expressed no direct critical opinion of the French classical drama. It is surprising that a *genre* which had aroused first his keen interest as the perfection of human artistic effort and

* Gräfl, *Goethe über seine Dichtungen*, II, 4, 519, dates it 1772 (?).

† It is noticeable that up to 1775 Goethe mentioned but once (letter to Oeser, Oct. 14, 1769; W., IV, 1, 205) Lessing, who, in his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*—especially in the 80th and 81st chapters—had driven the French from their place of supremacy over German letters. This is perhaps accounted for when Lessing's attitude toward the Storm and Stress movement and Goethe's *Götz* is recalled (Schmidt, *Lessing*, 2, 55ff).

‡ He saw Crébillon's *Electre* in an Italian translation in Venice and it disgusted him as insipid and tedious. (Italian Journey, diaries, Oct. 7, 1786; W., III, 1, 275.) In the *Esther* parody found in *Das Jahrmarktsfest zu Plundersweilern*, he hit off the style of the *haute tragédie* of the French, and in 1781, in *Das Neueste von Plundersweilern*, he had a little fun at the expense of the French tragedy, but these satires hardly constitute critical opinion. (W., I, 16, 54.)

¹ Aus Goethes Briefftasche; Mercier-Wagner, *Neuer Versuch über die Schauspielkunst*, ca. 1775; W., I, 37, 314.

² D. u. W., III, 14; W., I, 28, 295.

³ *Goethes Mahomet, ein Vortrag*, 58.

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then his utter disapproval should be almost unmentioned critically for twenty-four years.*

Of course, part of this period—eleven years, from his advent in Weimar (1775) down to his trip to Italy (1786)—covers the time of his career as a minister at the court of Karl August when he was engrossed in affairs of state and his attention was largely drawn away from literature.

What, however, was the reason for the silence of the subsequent thirteen years? It could scarcely be fortuitous. Was it a time of gradual approach to the favorable attitude of the last period, or did the enthusiasm for ancient art force the consideration of that of France into the background? The latter alternative seems more likely, but the evidence is by no means one-sided.

In general, this period shows a modifying of Goethe's radicalism in all directions. The acquaintance with Frau von Stein and his increasing and intimate interest in the established order of society as represented in the government of Karl August induced a slowing down of Goethe's Storm and Stress pulse and a calmer outlook on life. It marked the beginning of conservatism—a common ground on which it would be more easily possible for him to sympathize with the spirit of institutionalism as opposed to that of his own earlier individualism. In this period the idea of limiting the individual was not so galling to him. Such a point of view would at least make him more open to a truer appreciation of the French classic drama—the product of a highly absolutistic society.

Then, another element which might have helped to recon-

* Corneille is mentioned twice:—conversation with Iffland, Dec. 22, 1779; Biedermann, *Goethes Gespräche*, 1, 103; letter to Frau v. Stein, Feb. 3, 1781; W., IV, 5, 45; Molière eight times:—diaries, Feb. 5 and 7, 1777; Oct. 20, 1778; June 10, 1779; Jan. 22, 1798; Apr. 24, 1799; W., III, vol. 1, pp. 33, 71, 86, and vol. 2, pp. 197f, 243; letters to Frau v. Stein, Apr. 12, 1782; to Karl August, Nov. 17 and Dec. 8, 1787; W., IV, 5, 309; 8, 294, 306; Voltaire twice:—conversation with Leisewitz, Aug. 14, 1780; B., 1, 107; diaries, Jan. 12, 1799; W., III, 2, 229; Crébillon:—Italian Journey, diaries, Oct. 7, 1786; W., III, 1, 275; Destouches once:—diaries, Apr. 16, 1799; W., III, 2, 242; and French classic drama in general twice:—letter to Dalberg, Apr. 10, 1780; W., IV, 4, 207; *Das Neueste von Plundersweilern*; 1781; W., I, 16, 54.

cile him with French ideals was the French culture of the Weimar court.¹ In such an atmosphere, French literature and French ways of looking at things must certainly again have had an influence upon him.

Nevertheless, when Goethe took up his pen again in 1786, he did not express any attitude toward French classic drama although during the two years following he was revelling in classicism in Italy. This visit to the South marked a development in him of enthusiasm for the noble simplicity, quiet grandeur, and moderation of Greek art, and a growth away from those ideals which produced the impetuous overflow of spirits of a *Götz von Berlichingen* to those which found expression in the noble dignity of an *Iphigenie*.

In his essay on *Epic and Dramatic Poetry*, contained in the Goethe-Schiller correspondence* and written in 1797, Goethe gave expression to his ideas on the rules governing these *genres*. In some ways he approached the standpoint of the French drama. In his opinion, for example, the action of the piece must be limited in time,² but he did not restrict it to the conventional twenty-four hours of French tragedy. Tragic action consists, not in "alarums and excursions" but in soul conflicts, that is, the struggle should be an inner rather than an external one, and therefore needs little extent in space.³ The characters, too, he said, are best of a certain degree of culture⁴ so as to be capable of a high degree of self-expression. They should be influential, not because they are kings, or priests, or warriors, but because they possess personality. Goethe's *Iphigenie* is a good type of such a character. On the other hand, he repudiated the French use of the epic element in the drama, their employment of narration as a substitute for action completely present.⁵

In 1798-99, in commenting upon Diderot's *Essai de la*

* This essay was originally a supplement to Goethe's letter to Schiller, Dec. 23, 1797 (W., IV, 12, 381), W., I, 41², 521.

¹ Rossel, 439; Köster, 246.

² *Über epische und dramatische Dichtung*; 1797; W., I, 41², 220.

³ *Ueber epische und dramatische Dichtung*; 1797; W., I, 41², 221.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 220.

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peinture, Goethe, in opposition to the French writer, emphasized the idea that rules and forms arise, not from without, but from within the soul of a great genius; they are results, not causes. Utterly futile is the attempt to force genius to conform to art credos developed in other times and other places. No nation has the supreme and only inspired word on art and hence no right to foist upon other peoples as an absolute norm, even the results of their best experience.*¹

True, it is of art in general and not of French dramaturgy in particular that he is here speaking, but from this statement it is easy to perceive the real point at issue between Goethe and French classic dramaturgy: the former saw more beauty in content and spirit clothed in appropriate form, while the latter saw the greater beauty in form. The difference between these two points of view is very fundamental and one which Goethe felt throughout his life, except in the Frankfurt-Leipzig period.

It seems fairly certain, then, that Goethe's growing enthusiasm for the classic point of view in this period, his appreciation of French classic dramaturgy increased only in so far as he esteemed it to have caught the spirit of the ancients.

* This is a larger development, but in a calmer fashion, of the idea contained in embryo in the Shakespeare speech (cf. above, p. 516) and more explicitly stated in the Mercier-Wagner essay of the same period (cf. above, p. 517).

¹ Sie (artists or nations) conveniren nicht über diess und jenes, das aber anders sein könnte, sie reden nicht mit einander ab, etwas Ungeschicktes für das Rechte gelten zu lassen, sondern sie bilden zuletzt die Regeln aus sich selbst, nach Kunstgesetzen, die eben so wahr in der Natur des bildenden Genies liegen als die grosse allgemeine Natur die organischen Gesetze ewig thätig bewahrt. Es ist hier gar die Frage nicht, auf welchem Raum der Erde, unter welcher Nation, zu welcher Zeit man dieses Regeln entdeckt und befolgt habe. Es ist die Frage nicht, ob man an andern Orten, zu andern Zeiten, unter andern Umständen davon abgewichen sei, ob man hie und da etwas Conventionelles dem Gesetzmässigen substituirt habe; ja es ist nicht einmal die Frage, ob die echten Regeln jemals gefunden oder befolgt worden sind? sondern man muss kühn behaupten, dass sie gefunden werden müssen und dass, wenn wir sie dem Genie nicht vorschreiben können, wir sie von dem Genie zu empfangen haben, das sich selbst in seiner höchsten Ausbildung fühlt und seinen Wirkungskreis nicht verkennt. *Diderots Versuch über die Malerei*; W., I, 45, 257f.

He shows no liking for elements typically French; indeed, he criticises the French writers indirectly for their attitude in believing themselves the only recipients of the inspired word of dramatic law and for their tendency not to represent action as completely present. The points of which Goethe does grow in appreciation in these twenty-four years are: the use of verse in elevated drama,¹ the stricter observance of the unities of time and place, the beauty of the inward as opposed to the outward struggle on the stage, the elevated rank of tragic characters, and a general tone of moderation, simplicity, and grandeur—all points found in Greek practice. It was, apparently, the necessity of providing a more dignified art for the German stage that gave the impetus in the next period to his more favorable attitude toward French classical drama and broke the silence of a quarter century.

Something should be said here of the expressions of opinion of the French classic drama in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and especially in the first version of this work, *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung*, or the *Urmeister*. In the latter several pages are taken up with a discussion of the French dramaturgy—material which was omitted from the final version altogether. For example, during Wilhelm's convalescence, after the close of the affair with Marianne, Werner visits his friend each evening to divert his attention from his misfortune. Among other things Werner, who has been reading Corneille, is much confused by the quarrel over the rules and unities and expresses a great desire for a standard of judgment in theatrical matters. To help his friend out of the difficulty, Goethe-Wilhelm, who has thought much on such affairs and has acquired a point of view, utters some very sensible words about the troublesome unities: he declares any rule good which is based upon real observation of nature and in harmony with the character of an object and is of its very essence. As to the unities, there are a dozen—unity of customs and manners (*Sitten*), of tone, of language, of character drawing (*Charakter in sich*), of dress, of decoration, and of illumination (*Erleuchtung*)—quite as important as the noted three of the French. He grows enthusiastic over

¹ Letter to Schiller, Nov. 25, 1797; W., IV, 12, 361.

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Corneille for his independence and nobility of his characters, for his skill in handling situation, and for the rhetorical quality of his verse.¹

These sentiments do not necessarily reveal Goethe's attitude during the years 1777ca-1782, the period of composition of the *Urmeister*, but they seem rather his feelings of the Frankfurt-Leipzig period as modified by the point of view of the later Storm and Stress;² for it is apparent that these recollections are tinged with a mature and more liberal view of art than Goethe had attained in either the Frankfurt-Leipzig or in the early Storm and Stress period. Nor can the decidedly pro-French attitude of the *Lehrjahre* proper and the admiration for Racine³ especially be definitely stamped as a product of the early Weimar years, but it seems to have its roots in the boyish enthusiasm for a brilliant court life and for the French drama.

Period of Truest Appreciation, 1799-1832. "The chief lack of our theater and the reason that neither players nor spectators get a proper idea of what it should be is, in general, the variegated nature of what appears on our boards and the default of suitable limits by which one can form one's taste. It seems to me to be no advantage that we have widened out our theater to take in, as it were, the limitless spectacle of nature. Neither directors nor actors, however, can set narrower limits until the taste of the nation itself shall mark out the proper bounds. Every good society can exist only under certain conditions; so it is, too, with a good theater. Certain manners and ways of speech, certain subjects and sorts of behavior must be excluded. One does not become poorer for limiting one's household."⁴

Possibly it was while confronted with the practical problems of theatrical management that Goethe wrote the above words in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. It was a time, in Germany, when the ideals for the drama in the modern sense were

¹ Maync, Goethe. *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung*, 76.

² Billeter, *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung*, Einleitung, 6-10; cf. above p. 517.

³ *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, III, 8; W., I, 21, 288f.

⁴ *Lehrjahre*, V. 16; W., I, 22, 232f.

in process of formation. Goethe longed for a more artistic type than was prevalent and it was the increasing sense of this lack which formed for him the connecting link with the classic dramatic art of the French. When Goethe had first taken over the direction of the court theater in 1791, he felt little interest in his task. As time went on, however, and especially under the impulse of the friendship with Schiller, he manifested an increasing determination to make this stage the home of a dignified art,¹ but he found himself confronted by two problems which put his ideals for the drama to a severe test; first, how to get his actors to speak their rôles in a distinct and dignified fashion; and second, how to wean the public from a taste for vapid realism, crass naturalism, rant, and diseased passion to an appreciation of a more elevated, restrained and dignified drama.² By 1796, however, a long hoped-for visit of Iffland gave a new impulse to correct acting, and in 1798, Schiller came to his friend's aid with a noble example of dramatic art in verse, *Wallenstein*.³ These beginnings were excellent, but only a small part of what was needed. It was in this time* of appreciation of a regular and elevated drama and in his hour of need as a theatrical manager that he received Wilhelm von Humboldt's letter from Paris. Here Humboldt set forth soundly and at considerable length the merits and defects of French histrionic and dramatic art, laying especial emphasis on what the Germans might learn from their neighbors in the way of an artistic drama. He also indicated that the French had more passion and "Lebensgefühl" in their dramatic literature than had been supposed.⁴

This letter impressed Goethe profoundly and helped him, as he says, to a clear conception of French classic drama.⁵ Here in the one-time despised literature he found an art—not the noblest to be sure, but a worthy and lofty one⁶—which

* August 1799.

¹ Devrient, *Gesch. d. deut. Schauspielkunst*, 2, 71ff.

² Wahle, *Das Weimarer Theater unter Goethes Leitung*, 71ff.

³ *Ibid*, 60ff, 96ff, 132.

⁴ *Propyläen*, 3, 66-109.

⁵ Letter to v. Humboldt, Oct. 28, 1799; W., IV, 14, 209.

⁶ *Einige Szenen aus Mahomet nach Voltaire*; ca. Oct. 15, 1799; W., I, 40, 67f.

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could very well serve his purpose for the Weimar stage, and which gave opportunity to re-introduce verse as the proper medium of tragedy,¹—a reform which lay very near his heart. Enlightened and made enthusiastic by Humboldt's letter, he prosecuted more vigorously² the translation of Voltaire's *Mahomet*, which had been begun at the request of the Duke.³

Goethe's reawakened interest in the French classic drama was thoroughgoing: he not only read it again with increased pleasure,⁴ but the next year he began staging French classic pieces, among them Molière's *Avare*, Corneille's *Cid* and *Rodogune*, Racine's *Mithridate* and *Phèdre*, and Voltaire's *Zaïre*, *Mort de César*, *Mahomet*, and *Tancrède*.⁵ Of these dramas Goethe himself translated the last two.*

On the whole, throughout this period, Goethe manifested no variation from this moderately but genuinely appreciative attitude toward the classic drama of the French. To be sure,

* Of the seventy-nine foreign dramas played on the Weimar stage during Goethe's directorship, thirty-six, or nearly one-half were French. Heine, *Die Ausländischen Dramen im Spielplane des Weimarischen Theaters unter Goethes Leitung*, Zs. f. vgl. Lit.-Gesch., N. F., 4, 314.

¹ Wahle, 135.

² Dieser Aufsatz, (Humboldt's letter, *Propyläen*, 3, 66-109) welcher sehr zur rechten Zeit kam, hat auf mich und Schillern einen besondern Einfluss gehabt und unser Anschauen des französischen Theaters völlig ins Klare gebracht. Durch eine sonderbare Veranlassung übersetzte ich den Mahomet des Voltaire ins Deutsche. Ohne Ihren Brief wäre mir dieses Experiment nicht gelungen, ja ich hätte es nicht unternehmen mögen. Da ich das Stück nicht allein ins Deutsche, sondern, wo möglich, für die Deutschen übersetzen möchte; so war mir Ihre Charakteristik beyder Nationen über diesen Punct ein äusserst glücklicher Leitstern und ist es noch jetzt bei der Ausarbeitung. So wird auch die Wirkung des Stücks auf dem Theater Ihre Bemerkungen, wie ich voraussehe, völlig bekräftigen. Letter to W. v. Humboldt, Oct. 28, 1799; W., IV, 14, 209.

³ *Briefwechsel Karl Augusts mit Goethe*, 252.

⁴ Seitdem mir Humboldts Brief und die Bearbeitung Mahomets ein neues Licht über die französische Bühne aufgestellt haben, seitdem mag ich lieber ihre (the French) Stücke lesen und habe mich jetzt an den Crebillon begeben. Letter to Schiller, Oct. 23, 1799; W., IV, 14, 203.

⁵ Heine, 4, 317ff; Burkhardt, *Das Repertoire des Weimarischen Theaters unter Goethes Leitung*, 1791-1817; *Theatergeschichtliche Forschungen*, 1, 35-104.

there are several statements of his which might be quoted to prove the contrary, for Goethe's sensitive nature reacted differently toward this, as many another subject, under varying moods and in different presences. With one person he might point out its defects, with another he might dwell on its merits. To illustrate this apparently unstable attitude let me juxtapose some statements which seem to approach contradiction of each other.

When Frau von Staël visited Weimar in 1804, he felt heartily out of sympathy with the restricted form and unnatural pathos of the French classic drama* and he declared that the Germans would rather do without the kernel of value in French drama than thresh over a mass of worthless straw.¹

In a more appreciative mood, in a letter to Schiller the following year (1805), he felt that in their treatment of French literature either as a model or otherwise, they had regarded it as too stiff.² Again, in 1808, saddened by the sight of so many young and promising German talents shipwrecking on the rocks of Romanticism with its lack of form and technique, he felt that, in the mastery of form,³ in many of the limitations,⁴ and in the unity of idea although mechanically interpreted,⁵ there were qualities which should not be considered too unkindly and which should to a certain degree be coveted.^{4, 6}

Writing to a Frenchman, de Vitry, in 1824, Goethe declared that it would always be a pleasure to feel himself somewhat in accord with French literature which he had always

* This was perhaps due to the personality of Frau von Staël herself, with whom he had little patience.

¹ Es ward abermals klar, der Deutsche möchte wohl auf ewig dieser beschränkten Form, diesem abgemessenen und aufgedunsenen Pathos entsagt haben. Den darunter verborgenen hübschen natürlichen Kern mag er lieber entbehren, als ihn aus so vieler nach und nach darum gehüllten Unnatur gutmütig herausklauben. *Biographische Einzelheiten*; 1804, W., I, 36, 262.

² Letter to Schiller, Feb. 28, 1805; W., IV, 17, 263.

³ Letter to C. F. v. Reinhard, Mar. 30, 1827; W., IV, 42, 112.

⁴ Conversation with v. Humboldt, Nov. 17, 18, 1808; B., 2, 5.

⁵ Conversation with S. Boisserée, Aug. 7, 1815; B., 2, 320.

⁶ Conversation with Falk, Feb. 1810; B., 2, 67.

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highly appreciated and to which he owed so much.¹ The following year (1825), he assumed a less sympathetic attitude. He saw in French literature not the expression of the universal, but rather many elements of the unusual which would cause it to age.² Again, in 1828, he asserted that much of the Frenchman's admiration for his drama was worship of aristocracy of dramatic convention, and that this regard caused him to forget that he was in reality greatly bored.³ But, again, compare with these last two expressions of opinion a statement to Kozmian in 1830 that the masterpieces of the French stage will remain masterpieces forever.⁴

Stephan Schütze reports a conversation* with Goethe in which this very changeableness of attitude is brought out:⁵ "One must not at all believe that Goethe always remained fixed in his views. No! but it was the very fact that he was always open to conviction and continually subjected things to new investigation and that which for the time being seemed to him certain to new tests, which made him receptive for such different things. His doubting and his accepting often went to strange lengths. He said to me once: 'I don't know after all but that the French (in their classic tragedy) were on the right road.' Perhaps he said this in his own interest since in his own dramas, because of the increasing epic serenity of his own nature, he let his characters give full expression to themselves—which of course is the main thing—in long speeches and with little display of physical action. That, in this way, he could produce no theatrical effects, he recognized afterwards and said, 'I have written *against* the theater' "

As to a strict interpretation of the unities, Goethe was in the main never very friendly; yet on some occasions he seemed to value them more highly than on others. In 1808, Napoleon, discussing with him the French theater, reproached the Ger-

* At the home of Johanna Schopenhauer.

¹ Mar. 29, 1824; W., IV, 38, 97.

² Conversation with Eckermann, June 11, 1825; B., 3, 210f.

³ *Französischer Haupttheater*; 1828; W., I, 40, 134.

⁴ Conversation with Kozmian, May 8, 1830; B., 4, 270.

⁵ 1806, 1807, and later; B., 2, 240.

mans with laxity in this respect. Goethe replied, "Sire, les unités chez nous ne sont pas essentielles."¹ In his *Maximen und Reflexionen über Literatur und Ethik*,* he declared that there was nothing to be said against the three unities when the subject was very simple. Even a larger number ("drei mal drei Einheiten"), cleverly employed, might on occasion be effective.² In the mask, *Mahomet*, in 1818, he asserted that the drama in all its plenitude of incident must limit itself in time, place, and action as in the French and Greek theater.³ Then, in a different mood, he spoke of the Scylla of the three unities and declared that it mattered little where or how one admitted the improbable on the stage as long as there had to be improbabilities if there was to be any drama at all.⁴ Discussing the same point with Eckermann in 1825, he said that the French had misunderstood the spirit of the Greek drama, had divorced the unities from their cause, and had come to worship them as good in themselves, and had overlooked the fact that with the Greeks the proper presentation of a dramatic subject was more than the observance of any rules. In other words, the unities are useful in so far as they aid in making a drama more comprehensible. Unfortunately, the French, in their over-anxiety to follow rules of thumb, sin against the very comprehensibility which they desire, by substituting narration for action.⁵ This is apparently the crux of the whole matter in Goethe's mind, as far as the question of the unities is concerned.†

* I could find no date for this other than that of *Kunst und Altertum*, 1817-1827.

¹ Conversation with Napoleon, Sept. 30 and following days, 1808; B., 1, 541.

² *Maximen und Reflexionen über Literatur und Ethik; Aus Kunst und Altertum*; W., I, 42², 159. (1817-1827).

³ *Maskenzug von 1818, Mahomet*; W., I, 16, 279.

⁴ Conversation with v. Müller, May 8, 1822; B., 2, 571.

⁵ Conversation with Eckermann, Feb. 24, 1825; B., 3, 162f.

† In this connection, Goethe's changing attitude toward Shakespeare and the Englishman's disregard of the unities is interesting. In 1815 he denied the Elizabethan the unity of idea which the French observed, but mechanically (conversation with Boisseree, Aug. 7, 1815; B., 2, 320), and deemed him epic and philosophic rather than dramatic (conversation with Boisseree and Thibaut, Sept. 20, 1815; B., 2, 343f). In 1818, he felt

In a word, Goethe's final attitude toward the French classic drama was that, in so far as it represented artistic self-control and not artistic malnutrition, it was true art. It was his belief that the dramatic genius, at first avoiding all limitations as unnatural, tended more and more to produce according to rules, developed from his own experience and thus to approach nearer the strictness of form of French tragedy. He regarded the Greek drama not as an arbitrary model but as the acme of dramatic production—and therefore to be followed—because the insight of the ancient Greeks into the nature of the drama had been so keen that none had yet surpassed their discoveries in this field. He did not bow down to worship these forms because they bore the stamp of the authority of an Aristotle or of a French Academy, but because he felt that these rules, rightly understood, sprang from the nature of the drama itself. Here is the essential difference between Goethe's point of view and that of French classicism: he refused recognition to any rules of literary creation imposed by tradition or convention, acknowledging only those arising from inner necessity.*¹

II

GOETHE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD FRENCH CLASSIC DRAMATISTS IN PARTICULAR

Corneille. Goethe refers to Corneille but few times and only twice at length. Although he had read him largely as

the same lack (*Maskenzug von 1818 Mahomet*; W., I., 16, 279), but in 1825, he acknowledged that, in spite of this defect Shakespeare's pieces are easily understood while those of the French, with their Pharisaic observance of the law, are not. (conversation with Eckerman, Nov. 24, 1824; B., 3, 143).

* In this connection should be mentioned Goethe's attitude toward A. W. Schlegel's criticism of French drama. In the beginning he felt in fullest accord with his statements—and perhaps continued to be so with reference to French tragedy—but later Goethe took umbrage at his low estimate of Molière and declared this critic an unsafe guide. (Letters to Eichstädt, Nov. 18, 1807; W., IV, 19, 459f; to Frau v. Stein, Nov. 19, 1807; *ibid*, 19, 461; to v. Knebel, Jan. 10, 1810; *ibid*, 21, 161; conversation with Eckermann, Mar. 28, 1827; B., 3, 359f.)

¹ Cf. p. 521, note 1, also letter to Reinhard, Mar. 30, 1827; W., IV, 42, 112.

early as 1761,¹ he mentions by name but three of his dramas: the *Cid* five times,² *Cinna* twice,³ and *Nicomède* once.⁴ The earliest mention at any length,—found in the *Urmeister*,—(above, p. 14) shows Goethe very enthusiastic over the powerful situations, the noble characters, the simplicity, beauty, grandeur, and naturalness of his pieces and also over the dramatist's own nobility of soul shining through his situations and personages. "Ich bewundere, was über mir ist," says Goethe, "ich beurteile es nicht . . . Eine tiefere innere Selbständigkeit ist der Grund aller seiner Charaktere, Stärke des Geistes in allen Situationen ist das Liebste, was er schildert. Lass auch, dass sie in seinen jüngern Stücken manchmal als Rodomontade aufschlägt und in seinem Alter zu Härte vertrocknet, so bleibt es immer eine edle Seele, deren Aeusserungen uns wohl thun."⁵

Something of the same exalted opinion he expressed to Eckermann in 1827: he saw in Corneille a man of noble mind, fitted to inspire heroic souls, one at once prolific and possessed of a potent and lofty spirit manifest in all his work, although less felicitously in those of his youth and of his later years. It was this quality in Corneille which appealed to Napoleon, who needed a stout-hearted people, and caused the Emperor to say that, if the poet were living, he would make him a prince.⁶

A short statement in *Maximen und Reflexionen über Literatur und Ethik* also sheds light on Goethe's estimate of him. "Durch die despotische Unvernunft des Cardinal Richelieu war Corneille an sich selbst irre geworden."⁷ This very evidently refers to the quarrel over the *Cid* and the way in which Corneille had been turned aside from the dramatic pro-

¹ *D. u. W.*, I, 3; *W.*, I, 26, 171.

² *Ibid*; also conversation with Iffland, Dec. 22, 1779; *B.*, 1, 103; diaries, Oct. 5, 1799 and Jan. 30, 1806; *W.*, III, 2, 263 and 3, 116; *Französisches Haupttheater* (Lesarten); 1828; *W.*, I, 40, 420.

³ Letters to Frau v. Stein, Feb. 3, 1781; *W.*, IV, 5, 45; Maync, *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung*, 79.

⁴ Diaries, Oct. 27, 1807; *W.*, III, 3, 289.

⁵ Maync, 80.

⁶ Conversation with Eckermann, Apr. 1, 1827, *B.*, 3, 365.

⁷ *Aus Kunst und Altertum*; 1817-1827; *W.*, I, 42^a, 118.

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gram started in that drama and had been forced into the strait-jacket of the rules, into an art form essentially uncongenial to him.¹

Molière. In the previous chapter, it was seen that Goethe's attitude, favorable or otherwise, toward French classic drama was almost altogether an estimate of its form. This feature did not play so large a rôle in his judgment of comedy, for this type of drama does not need as much breathing space as tragedy. Goethe was not disturbed, therefore, by the vexatious questions of the observance of rules in his relationship with Molière. It was as an artist and as a personality that Molière attracted him. The relation of Goethe to the great comedy writer rises and stays, undisturbed, on a higher plane than that between him and any other French dramatist, or many great literary men, for that matter. In the case of Molière and Goethe, it was one man speaking from the depths of his experience and insight through the medium of a finished art to a fellow artist and a fellow man of extraordinarily sympathetic temperament.² Of all writers of the French classic period, then, Goethe felt most attracted to Molière, quoting from him frequently, referring to his works very often, and devoting some time every year to renewing his inspiration at this unfailing source.³ No such compliment does he mention paying to any other man. "Personne en Allemagne n'a jamais voué à Molière un culte aussi ardent."⁴

Goethe had read all Molière's works as early as 1761. At the first, his pieces did not especially impress him.⁵ By 1769, however, he had studied him very closely,⁶ and felt competent to make some selections for Cornelia, his sister, to read.⁷ A presentation of the *Tartuffe* appealed to him because of the

¹ Petit de Julleville, *Histoire de la langue et de la littérature française*, IV, 1, 280f.

² Ehrhard, *les Comédies de Molière en Allemagne*, 305-368.

³ *Tag- und Jahreshefte*; 1805; W., I, 35, 189; conversation with Eckermann, May 12, 1825; B., 3, 209; *ibid*, 358.

⁴ Ehrhard, 306.

⁵ *D. u. W.*, I, 3; W., I, 26, 143.

⁶ *Tag- und Jahreshefte*; 1764 bis 1769; W., I, 35, 4.

⁷ Letter to Cornelia, Dec. 1765; W., IV, 1, 28.

truth in the drawing of the hypocrite: "Neulich sah ich Tartüffen. Top! da fiel mir ein Kerl ein der ebenso aussieht. . . Ein Schurke, wie der andere."¹

Three times Goethe speaks of his interest in Molière as life-long and of reading some of his pieces every year. This is probably true, even for the Storm and Stress years. There was little or no conflict between the spirit of the "Geniezeit" and that of Molière, and despite Lessing's cool and somewhat supercilious attack in the *Dramaturgie*, he probably suffered very little under the general contempt into which French classicism fell during the years 1770-1775.²

In Goethe's later years, he speaks very often to Eckermann of his high esteem for the Frenchman and of the great debt which he felt he owed him. He read him over and over again to keep Molière's greatness fresh in his mind and at each re-reading he felt increasing admiration for the genius of the playwright and for his unique personality. To him, Molière's comedies bordered on tragedy.³

He placed Molière among the greatest men of France,⁴ in the front rank of comedy writers,⁵ and he named him with Shakespeare and the Greeks as being the classics most worthy of study.⁶ This is because Molière was more than a mere successful stager of comic situations. To Goethe, he was in addition a man of culture in the very highest sense of the term. "Es ist nicht bloss das vollendete künstlerische Verfahren, was mich an ihm entzückt, sondern vorzüglich auch das liebenswürdige Naturell, das hochgebildete Innere des Dichters. Es ist in ihm eine Grazie und ein Takt für das Schickliche und ein Ton des feinen Umgangs, wie es seine angeborene schöne Natur nur im täglichen Verkehr mit den

¹ Ibid, 26.

² Rossel, 435, sees influence of *Tartuffe* on *Pater Brey*, and on the *Gross-Cophia* of a later period, 441. Ehrhard sees resemblances between *Don Juan* and *Faust*, 351; also Minor, *Goethes Faust*, 1, 164. This of course does not exhaust traces of Molière's influence on Goethe that various critics have pointed out.

³ Conversation with Eckermann; May 12, 1825; B., 3, 203.

⁴ Conversation with Eckermann; May 3, 1827; B., 3, 386.

⁵ *Französisches Schauspiel in Berlin*; 1828; W., I, 40, 131.

⁶ Conversation with Eckermann; Apr. 1, 1827; B., 3, 365.

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vorzüglichsten Menschen seines Jahrhunderts erreichen konnte."¹

Or again he says, "Was kann man mehr von einem Künstler sagen, als dass vorzügliches Naturell, sorgfältige Ausbildung und gewandte Ausführung bei ihm zur vollkommensten Harmonie gelangten?"²

Le Misanthrope, a favorite with Goethe,³ seemed to him, in content and treatment, tragic. In it is found the conflict between an extreme individualism on the one hand and the vapidness and deceits of society on the other. Molière proposes the question, How far must each give up in order to come together on a working basis? Goethe saw in the figure of the hero the uncorrupted instincts of Molière himself in the toils of the artificialities of the court life in which he moved, and a man who, unspoiled by the superficial elements of society, has remained sincere with himself, and would have only too gladly been so with others. Never, to Goethe's mind, had an author portrayed his own soul more completely and more attractively than Molière has done in this piece.⁴

Goethe expressed himself in much the same fashion about the *Avare* and the *Médecin malgré lui*. Disgusted at the signs of disease in contemporary literature, he found comfort in reading and studying Molière. He again felt impressed with the soundness of his nature and with the tonic effect of his plays: "Es ist an ihm nichts verbogen und verbildet. Und nun diese Grossheit! Er beherrschte die Sitten seiner Zeit . . . Molière züchtigte die Menschen, indem er sie in ihrer Wahrheit zeichnete."⁵

Not only as a man of ideas, of culture, and of sound instincts did Goethe recognize Molière but he perceived in him an eye for the theatrically effective and in his dramas the best modern theatrical practice. "Wenn wir . . . für unsere

¹ Conversation with Eckermann; Mar. 28, 1827; B., 3, 358.

² *Französisches Schauspiel in Berlin*; 1828; W., I, 40, 131.

³ Conversation with Eckermann, Mar. 28, 1827; B., 3, 358.

⁴ Notice sur J. Taschereau's *Histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de Molière*; 1828; W., I, 41², 334.

⁵ Conversation with Eckermann; Jan. 29, 1826; B., 3, 254.

modernen Zwecke lernen wollen uns auf dem Theater zu benehmen, so wäre Molière der Mann, an den wir uns zu wenden hätten."¹ He cites as further proof of this perfect knowledge of the tricks of the playwright's trade the scene in the *Malade imaginaire* (II, 11) where he used retardation to such good purpose to keep up the suspense.¹

Naturally enough, then, A. W. Schlegel's belittling criticism of the comic dramatic poet* was a blow to Goethe.² With his criticism of French classic tragedy, Goethe had been at first in fullest accord,³ but for his disparagement of Molière he could not forgive him. This, with the fact that Schlegel was one of the founders of the Romantic school, undoubtedly helped to put Goethe out of sympathy with him.⁴ He criticised him harshly and accused the Romanticist of lacking a sound basis for his criticism and of having failed utterly to understand the import of Molière's work. Goethe recognized that Schlegel knew a mass of facts and had read an enormous amount, but he denied that these things could take the place of sound judgment. He wound up by saying: "In the way in which Schlegel treats the French theater, I find a formula for a poor reviewer, who lacks every sense of what is excellent and who passes over a great personality as though it were chaff and stubble."⁵

Racine. There are quite a few references to Racine in Goethe's works,[†] but only four in which he expressed himself critically on this French dramatist.

Goethe early knew and venerated Racine. As a lad of twelve he had read him entire and the French tragic poet had

* In general, Schlegel's criticism of Molière was that he was a conscienceless and unskilled borrower of plots and tricks, a buffoon, a caricaturist; that he wrote much trash; that he was clumsy in handling situation; that he was unsound in his motiving. He denied him nearly every right to the praise of his countrymen. *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur*, 22. Vorlesung, 6, 103-124.

† I have found twenty-two such references.

¹ Conversation with Eckermann, Mar. 28, 1827; B., 3, 358.

² Letter to Zelster, July 27, 1828; W., IV, 44, 229.

³ Cf. p. 529, (footnote).

⁴ Conversation with W. v. Humboldt, Nov. 17 and 18, 1808; B., 2, 5.

⁵ With Eckermann, Mar. 28, 1827; B., 3, 359f.

become his "Abgott."¹ It was seen above (p. 4) how as a child, Goethe had enjoyed playing the rôle of Nero in *Britannicus*. Recalling this period sixty-nine years later (1830) he testified to a great interest in this dramatist and added that, under his inspiration, the idea of writing dramas had first come to him.² Goethe saw in Racine a "feinfühlenden Franzosen" and a realistic portrayer of the complicated life of a great court. In the third book of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Wilhelm expresses the following appreciation of the dramatist.† He tells the Prince that "he holds the French theater in very high esteem and that he reads the works of the great masters with delight, and with especial joy had he heard that the Prince fully appreciated the great talents of Racine. 'I can easily imagine,' he continued, 'how persons of high rank and superior breeding must hold a poet in high regard who portrays so artistically and correctly the circumstances of their lofty station. Corneille, if I may say so, has delineated grand and noble characters; Racine, persons of patrician rank. When I read his pieces, I can always picture to myself the poet who lives at a brilliant court, in the presence of a great king, holding constant intercourse with the most distinguished persons, and penetrating into the secrets of human nature, as it works concealed behind the gorgeous tapestry of palaces. When I study his *Britannicus* or his *Bérénice*, it seems to me as if I were transported in person to the court, were introduced to the ins and outs of these dwellings of the earthly gods, and saw through the eyes of a Frenchman of delicate sensibilities kings adored of a whole nation, courtiers envied by thousands, in their natural bearing, with their faults and their troubles'."³

† After a careful study of Goethe's general attitude toward Racine, I feel justified in citing this passage as his point of view put into Wilhelm's mouth. Whether or not it was altogether typical of Goethe's attitude toward Racine in the years 1794-1796—when the greater part of the *Lehrjahre* was written—is not certain. Cf. Billeter, *Einleitung*, pp. 6-10; also Creizenach, *Einleitung zu Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahren*, Goethes Sämtliche Werke, Jubiläums-Ausgabe, 17, xxvff.

¹ D. u. W., I, 3; W., I, 26, 170.

² Conversation with Kozmian, May 8, 1830; B., 4, 270.

³ *Lehrjahre*, III, 8; W., I, 21, 288f.

Voltaire. Goethe's attitude toward Voltaire is not like that toward any other French classic dramatist. It has been noted that he esteemed Corneille for his noble sentiments, Molière for the soundness of his nature, for his culture, and for his unsurpassed artistic skill, and Racine for his penetrating and psychologically subtle portrayal of court life; but Voltaire he appreciated rather as a master of form, as an author of dramas occupying a middle ground between the naturalism prevalent on the German stage and the classic idealism which, during his directorate of the Weimar stage, he came to covet for it. While he appreciated these other men more or less throughout his life, he was interested in Voltaire as a dramatist only for a few years beginning with September, 1799.

Goethe knew Voltaire as a playwright as early as his first year in Leipzig (1765).² Even at this time when Shakespeare had not yet assumed for him the importance which he later did, and while the young German was most sympathetic toward French classicism, he recognized that the intellectual and spiritual capacity of the Englishman was cast in a larger mold than that of Voltaire.¹

In the Storm and Stress period, Voltaire did not escape Goethe's iconoclasm; indeed, it seems that it was the French literature of the eighteenth century represented by Voltaire, its senility and its conventions which had first cooled Goethe's sympathy for French culture, in the Strassburg time.

Not until 1799 did Goethe's interest revert to the "Patriarch of Ferney." This return was brought about not by reading Voltaire's dramas but by Karl August's request for him to stage a Voltairean piece. "Als er jetzt, unfreiwillig und ohne besondere Lust, ja, wie Karl August recht gut erkannte: gegen seine Natur und Ueberzeugung, an die Arbeit ging, war es nicht der Stoff, sondern nur die Form, die ihm allmählig ein tieferes Interesse abgewann."² In the midst of this unpleasant prospect, as we have seen, Goethe

¹ Letter to Cornelia, ca. Dec. 6, 1765; W., IV, 1, 26.

² Letter to Oeser, Oct. 14, 1769; W., IV, 1, 205.

³ Minor, *Goethes Mahomet*, 43; *Briefwechsel Karl Augusts mit Goethe*, 252.

received great encouragement for his task from Humboldt's letter on the French theater.¹ He began the translation of *Mahomet* in September, 1799, and finished it by October 11; and the drama was represented January 30, 1800.² The undertaking, although an experiment,³ proved of great value to the Weimar stage by helping to clinch the reforms in acting and in dramatic style already begun by Iffland and Schiller. The experience gained in this presentation prepared the way for the heavier and more difficult pieces which soon followed.⁴

The success of *Mahomet* warranted doing *Tancrède* into German. He began it July 22, 1800 and finished it December 24, of the same year.⁵ *Mahomet* was translated almost as literally as the change from Alexandrine to pentameter blank verse permitted, but *Tancrède* was worked over in a freer fashion:⁶ it was given a less bombastic diction and relieved of some of the restraint of the original. Goethe himself considered the drama of much theatrical merit and an addition in many ways to the repertory of the Weimar stage and he had no doubt of its wholesome effect.⁷

It might be asked why Goethe played more of Voltaire's dramas on the Weimar stage than of any other French classic dramatist, and why he translated his pieces for this purpose and not those of any other French dramatic poet. Carel tries to answer the question by saying that Voltaire combined with the French theories of structure a keen sense of what is suited for presentation on the stage.⁸ *Mahomet*, Goethe tells us,⁹ was played to drill the actors in word for word memorizing, in declamation, and in dignified action; its general inter-

¹ Cf. above, p. 524.

² *Diaries*, 1799; W., III, 2, 262ff; *Tag- und Jahreshefte*; 1800; W., I, 35, 85.

³ Letter to v. Knebel, Nov. 7, 1799; W., IV, 14, 217.

⁴ *Tag- und Jahreshefte*; 1800; W., I, 35, 85.

⁵ *Diaries*, 1800; W., III, 2, 302-315.

⁶ Rossel, 446 (footnote); letter to Schiller, July 29, 1800; W., IV, 15, 91.

⁷ Letters to Schiller, July 25 and 29, 1800; W., IV, 15, 89, and 91.

⁸ Carel, *Voltaire und Goethe*, part IV, 20.

⁹ *Einige Szenen aus Mahomet nach Voltaire*; ca. Oct. 15, 1799; W., I, 40, 68.

est, its clearness, its pathetic situations, and the fewness of its characters made it in every way suitable for his stage.

A number of Goethe's friends expressed surprise and regret that he had dropped original work and taken up the translation of French drama.¹ Much later (1819), C. F. Zelter, in the same mood, was inclined to reproach Goethe for spending his time on such a task, for he felt that *Mahomet* and *Tancrède* lacked tragic significance, although he was fully aware of Voltaire's beautiful French and the symmetry and harmony of the dramas as a whole.² In reply to his friend's criticism, Goethe stated the whole purpose of his staging French dramas: "Was du über Mahomet und Tancrède sagst, ist vollkommen richtig; doch waren mir dergleichen abgemessene Muster zu meinen Theaterdidaskalien höchst nöthig und haben mir unsäglichen Vorthail gebracht, weswegen ich ihnen nicht feind seyn kann."³ Or as Schiller said, "Nicht Muster zwar darf uns der Franke werden, . . . ein Führer nur zum Bessern."⁴ His purpose was, then, a pedagogical one: this idea he reiterates a number of times.⁵

Minor Dramatists. Crébillon. With the revival of interest in the French classic drama, Goethe turned his attention to this French writer with the hope of possibly finding something serviceable for the Weimar stage. He said of this dramatist that he treated the passions of his characters like a deck of cards and that he produced astonishing situations by simply shuffling them together. Thus they did not change in the least by contact with each other nor did they manifest any reactions toward their fellows.⁶

¹ *Tag- und Jahreshefte*; 1801; W., I, 35, 91.

² Riemer, *Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter in den Jahren 1796 bis 1832*; 3, 41ff.

³ Letter to Zelter, Oct. 7, 1819; W., IV, 32, 52.

⁴ *An Goethe, als er den Mahomet von Voltaire auf die Bühne brachte*; Jan. 1800; G., 11, 325.

⁵ Letters to Hufeland, Dec. 30, 1799; W., IV, 14, 238; to Wolf, Nov. 15, 1802; *ibid*, 16, 141; to Voss, Nov. 30, 1802; *ibid*, 16, 147; to Zelter, Feb. 23, 1817; *ibid*, 27, 350; to same Oct. 7, 1819; *ibid*, 32, 52; conversation with David, Aug. 20, 1829; B., 4, 165.

⁶ Letter to Schiller, Oct. 23, 1799; W., IV, 14, 203f.

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Of Crébillon's pieces Goethe mentions the *Electre*¹ and *Rhadamiste et Zénobie*. In the latter he saw the acme of French classic mannerism, in comparison with which Voltaire's drama was pure nature.²

Destouches. As a boy Goethe held Destouches in high esteem for his portrayal of manners, but this playwright had fallen into disrepute by the time of Goethe's Strassburg period and he no longer mentioned him for fear of being called provincial.³

By way of summary, let me point out that as regards Corneille, it was the spirit and not the form of his works that Goethe valued; his content of ideas and his dramatic skill contributed nothing vital and lasting to the German poet. In spite of the enthusiastic mention of Corneille, the fewness of references to him seems to indicate that Goethe's appreciation was intellectual and that the French poet was a statue to be admired from a distance rather than a friend to be taken to his heart.

Molière, on the other hand, was an intimate acquaintance whom he admitted to the holy of holies of his affection, a free spirit like himself which could laugh at lifeless ideals and rise above them. To Goethe, he towered above all other French classic dramatists and took his place among the first literary men of the ages.

Goethe's relation to Racine—like that to Corneille—was one of thorough acquaintance merely and not that of intimacy and companionship as in the case of Molière. He appreciated this French dramatic poet for his artistic sincerity and for the truthfulness of his dramas. In connection with his discussion of Racine, he says nothing of matters of form and nothing of the unities of the French drama. This is surprising, for Racine is the consummate artist of French tragedy. Of all classicists, he best accommodated himself to the limiting traditions of French classic dramaturgy.

Goethe's renewed interest in French classic drama was

¹ Italian journey, diaries, Oct. 7, 1786; W., III, 1, 275.

² Letter to Schiller, Mar. 19, 1802; W., IV, 16, 58.

³ D. u. W., III, 11; W., I, 28, 63.

due to Humboldt's letter, the translation of *Mahomet*¹ and his need for dignified pieces for his stage. Perhaps he would have remained indifferent to it except for these impulses. Voltaire bridged the gulf to the better understanding of French drama. Two reasons induced Goethe to use him as a model; first, because he was nearly contemporary and had wielded an enormous influence on the century²—two facts which made the appeal of his pieces greater; and second, because his dramas, while they observed the limitations of French classicism, betrayed a greater practical knowledge of what was theatrically effective than did the pieces of Corneille and Racine. As for Crébillon and Destouches, Goethe found in them no great artists but rather the stragglers of the classic movement.

It is evident that Goethe's attitude toward the French classic dramatists as individuals, does not allow the same division into definite periods as does his estimate of the drama in general. On the whole, he never spoke of the French dramatists themselves with acerbity and rarely with disparagement. Of them all, Voltaire came nearest to passing through the same stages in Goethe's appreciation as did the school to which he belonged. While Corneille and Racine received almost no critical mention in the Storm and Stress time and the period of silence (1770-1799), Goethe's regard for them, in its recorded expression, suffered practically no change; that is, the value he sets upon them in the last period is his estimate of them in the Frankfurt-Leipzig years. On the other hand, his esteem for Molière as artist and man appears to rise in a steady crescendo culminating in the expressions of admiration in the conversations with Eckermann.

III

SCHILLER'S ATTITUDE TOWARD FRENCH CLASSIC DRAMA IN GENERAL

In Schiller's life there are no variations of attitude toward French classic drama sufficient to warrant dividing his career

¹ Letter to Schiller, Oct. 23, 1799; W., IV, 14, 203.

² Conversations with Eckermann, Feb. 13, 1829 and Jan. 3, 1830; B., 4, 68 and 186f.

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into periods. His school days were passed in a very French atmosphere, but the French point of view took such slight hold upon him that in later life it seems to have influenced him very little, if at all, in his judgment of the French ideals for the drama.

When he arrived at Castle Solitude and thus came under the domination of the pedagogical ideals of Duke Karl Eugen, he entered a world thoroughly French.¹ The Duke's own education had been French; and when he came to rule in Stuttgart, he modeled his court after that of Versailles.² When he caught the fever of reform, he set up a school copied after French institutions³ where the French language was given greater prominence than in any other German schools of the time.⁴ Native French teachers were employed. Thus it came about that Schiller was well instructed in the French type of the philosophy of the Enlightenment,⁵ and had a better reading and speaking knowledge of French* than of any other foreign idiom.⁶ With such surroundings it is certain that he became acquainted with the masters of the French classic stage.† If he had left an autobiography, as did Goethe, we might know definitely what he became acquainted with and how it impressed him. Whatever he may have read or seen, however, left no deeply vital impress upon his literary consciousness.

To those acquainted with the career of Schiller, it is well

* To be sure, one gets no very favorable idea of Schiller's attainment even in French: in the school records for the years between 1776 and 1778, we find his grade only "fairly good" (ziemlich gut). Minor, *Aus dem Schiller-Archiv*, 18.

† He apparently knew little of Voltaire as a dramatist until 1799. Letter to Goethe, May 31, 1799; Jonas, *Schillers Briefe*, 6, 35.

¹ Conversation with Genast, May 13 and 14, 1800; Petersen, *Schillers Gespräche. Berichte seiner Zeitgenossen über ihn*, 298; Schanzenbach, *Französische Einflüsse bei Schiller*, 5; Berger, *Schillers Leben*, 1, 99.

² Schanzenbach, 5.

³ Ibid, 6.

⁴ Ibid, 7.

⁵ Ibid, 9.

⁶ Ibid, 7f.

known that his school life in the ducal military academy was not the happiest. The rigorous restraint and suppression of the individuality of the pupils approached brutality.¹ It is not astonishing, therefore, that, relieved from such confinement, he underwent a period of violent reaction.

In the iconoclastic drama, *Die Räuber*, published in 1781, this reaction first finds in Schiller vehement expression. In it and in its preface, he announces his Storm and Stress platform containing both social and literary planks. This piece of work is not only a protest against social decay and tyranny, but it treads ruthlessly on some of the sacred conventions of the French stage by its setting in the present, by its boisterous action, by its use of a robber band as the protagonist, and by its disregard of the unities of time and place. Schiller feels his own literary consciousness to be a safe enough guide in his literary self-expression, and so, like Goethe in his period of revolt, he throws off the yoke of tradition and institutionalism and demands to see and feel for himself. To this young disciple of Rousseau, French classic drama has removed itself so far from nature that it is worthy only of scorn. Theoretically, as well as practically, he criticises both the spirit and the form of French drama. To the German dramatist, drunk with the spirit of a newly found liberty, no sorrier fate can befall a hero than to appear some day in the strait-jacket of French tragedy.*

In the preface to *Die Räuber*, Schiller pointed out some of the reasons why French drama is so stiff and repelling. To his mind, the French lack to a large degree a sense of what is truly dramatic when they substitute such a large element of narration for action on their stage. It is here that he first took issue with this narrative element in the French classic

* Karl Moor, denouncing the enervation and decrepitude of the age, cries out to Spiegelberg (*Die Räuber*, I, 2): "Schöner Preiss für euren Schweiß in der Feldschlacht, dass ihr jetzt in Gymnasien lebet, und eure Unsterblichkeit in einem Bücherriemen mühsam fortgeschleppt wird. Kostbarer Ersatz eures verprassten Blutes, von einem Nürnberger Krämer um Lebkuchen gewickelt—oder, wénns glücklich geht, von einem französischen Tragödienschreiber auf Stelzen geschraubt, und mit Drathfäden gezogen zu werden. Hahaha!" Goedeke, *Schillers Werke*, 2, 29.

¹ Berger, 1, 62ff.

pieces and asserted that tragedy must portray its world as *present* and the passions and secret sentiments in the hearts of its characters *by their own words and actions*. This art of direct representation is lost to the French and consequently their drama is so much the weaker for it.¹

The following year (1782), in strong words typical of Storm and Stress exuberance, he poked fun at the affected and blasé spirit of French tragedy: it was too self-conscious and too calculating, too fearsome and too mincing to appeal to him. "Die Menschen des Peter Korneille sind frostige Behorcher ihrer Leidenschaft—altkluge Pedanten ihrer Empfindung. Den bedrängten Roderich hör ich auf offener Bühne über seine Verlegenheit Vorlesung halten, und seine Gemüthsbewegungen sorgfältig, wie eine Pariserin ihre Grimassen vor dem Spiegel, durchmustern. Der leidige Anstand in Frankreich hat den Naturmenschen verschnitten.—Ihr Kothurn ist in einen niedlichen Tanzschuh verwandelt. . . Zu Paris liebt man die glatten zierlichen Puppen, von denen die Kunst alle kühne Natur hinwegschliff. Man wägt die Empfindung nach Granen und schneidet die Speisen des Geists diätetisch vor, den zärtlichen Magen einer schwächtigen Marquisin zu schonen."²

As early as this same essay, *Ueber das gegenwärtige deutsche Theater*, however, and in connection with one of his most drastic criticisms of the French theater, Schiller announced a principle by which he stood throughout his life, namely, that the German stage must find a middle course between the over-refinement of the French on the one hand and the over-coarse and realistic art of the English on the other. It is the duty of the dramatist to give all the truth and proportion of the wall-painting on the smaller scale of the miniature. We human beings, he says, stand in the presence of the universe like ants before a majestic palace. It is an enormous structure of which our insect gaze takes in but the one wing. We perhaps find its columns and statues chaotically arranged while the eye of a higher being can perceive also the opposite wing whose statues and columns, corresponding to the first,

¹ Erste Vorrede zu *den Räubern*; 1781; G., 2, 4.

² *Über das gegenwärtige deutsche Theater*; 1782; G., 2, 343f.

give the building a symmetry which we thought lacking. Let the poet depict for the insect eye if he will, but let him bring also into our field of vision, in miniature, the other half of the whole. Let him prepare us for the harmony of the mass through that of the detail, for the symmetry of the aggregate through that of the part. A neglect in this regard is an injustice to the eternal Being who demands to be comprehended from the totality of the world and not from single, isolated fragments.¹

By 1784, the Storm and Stress hardness of heart toward things French had modified sufficiently for Schiller, in the *Rheinische Thalia*, to grow enthusiastic over a situation in Corneille's *Cinna*. This is the scene (V, 3) where the emperor, Augustus, forgives the conspirator, Cinna, for his designs on the imperial power. To Schiller's mind, such an occurrence presented on the stage could not but stir the springs of magnanimous action in the hearts of the spectators.²

The idea of discovering a mean between the extremes of the French and of the English drama grows on him. It is in this same year (1784) that he extends his reading acquaintance with French literature in order to gain a broader basis for a theoretical knowledge of the theater: at this time, too, he finds enough value in the French drama to begin to cherish the idea of translating pieces of Corneille, Racine, Crébillon, and Voltaire for the Mannheim theater.³

His early dramas—*Die Räuber*, *Fiesco*, *Kabale und Liebe*—had been written in prose, but by 1786, he had proceeded far enough from Storm and Stress carelessness of form and the realism of the middle-class tragedy to use blank verse—iambic pentameter.*—in his *Don Carlos*. In his preface, he expressed his conversion to the justice of Wieland's demand that

* Lessing, following in the footsteps of Shakespeare, had set the first successful example in his *Nathan* (1779) for the use of verse, and particularly of this meter, in the German drama.

¹ *Über das gegenwärtige deutsche Theater*; 1782; G., 2, 344f.

² *Rheinische Thalia*; 1784; G., 3, 516.

³ Letter to Dalberg, Aug. 24, 1784; J., 1, 207.

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drama requires the added poetic quality of verse.* On the other hand, he discarded rhyme as an unnatural ornament and a substitute for an harmonious diction.¹

In the essays on esthetic and literary subjects, written in the late eighties and early nineties, Schiller defines his attitude toward several sacred dramatic dogmas of the French. While he did not always mention these dogmas, the enunciation of the following five principles must certainly show how he regarded them in the practice of the French classic tragedy.

First. The demand of the French that the dramatist adhere closely to the facts of history or of legend. One of the fairly inflexible rules of the French classic stage was that the dramatist do no violence to history or legend in the composition of the play.² Schiller feels that the insistence on such a rule is shooting beside the mark. It is a very short-sighted theory of art which would thus clip the wings of poetic imagination. It is the dramatist's business to aim at esthetic effects and it makes not an iota of difference whether he observes the sequence of facts of history and legend as long as he attains the highest possible poetic truth. "Die poetische Wahrheit besteht aber nicht darin, dass etwas wirklich geschehen ist, sondern darin, dass es geschehen konnte, also in der Möglichkeit der Sache."³

Second. Narration versus action in tragedy. The limitations prescribed by the unity of time and the tendency to debar almost all action—especially violent scenes—necessitated that a large part of the action be unrepresented on the stage and be communicated mediately to the spectator by narration and description. Schiller insists that such a procedure is essentially undramatic and lacks the attention-compelling

* In the *Teutsche Merkur*, Oct. 1782, 29, 83, in the second letter "An einen jungen Dichter," Wieland, influenced by French tragedy, had demanded verse and rhyme for German tragedy. Schiller agreed with him on the first point but not on the second. A. W. Schlegel had also proved experimentally the importance of verse. See Köster, 87.

¹ Einleitung zu *Don Carlos*; 1786; G., 5¹, 3f.

² Corneille, *Discours de la tragédie*. Oeuvres, ed. Marty-Laveaux, 1, 77ff. Racine, Introductions to *Bajazet* and *Mithridate*. Oeuvres, ed. Régnier, 2, 488f and 3, 16.

³ *Vom Erhabenen*; 1793; G., 10, 173f.

power of the highest type of tragedy.* The sufferings of the tragic hero, their causes and degree must be given not by narration but by action.¹ Otherwise the play becomes simply a "five-act conversation." Schiller demands that the hero must not only suffer keenly but that he must be allowed to give full expression to what he feels, in order that the moral victory of his better self may be the more glorious. If the sharpness of the struggle be softened, it is impossible to tell whether he acts from deep moral conviction or not. "Dies letztere ist der Fall bei dem Trauerspiel der ehemaligen Franzosen, wo wir höchst selten oder nie die *leidende Natur* zu Gesicht bekommen, sondern meistens nur den kalten, deklamatorischen Poeten oder auch den auf Stelzen gehender Komödianten sehen."²

Third. Demand for drawing-room manners on the stage. In Schiller's opinion French tragedy suffers from an overstraining after dignity in language and in the bearing of the characters. Its style is cold and declamatory, appealing to the head rather than to the heart. This is partly due to the fact that the characters are too self-conscious: they are psychologists examining their own states of soul. They are—to use Schiller's terminology—sentimental rather than naive individuals. They never let themselves go, forgetful of all else but elemental passions. They prefer to be dignified rather than full-blooded men and women. The kings, princesses, and heroes never forget their rank: they resemble the kings and emperors of the old picture books, "die sich mitsamt der Krone zu Bette legen."¹

Fourth. Persons of rank alone are suitable subjects for tragedy. French classic dramaturgy demanded that tragic characters be taken from the highest ranks of society. Here the French mistook the point entirely. The Greeks portrayed mostly kings and heroes in their tragedies out of the dramatic necessity of finding tragic heroes capable of complete expres-

* In working over *Egmont* for the stage, in 1795, Schiller puts this principle into practice. In this revision, therefore, "was Goethe erzählt, das stellt Schiller vor die Augen des Zuschauers." Köster, 6ff.

¹ *Über die tragische Kunst*; 1792; G., 10, 29f.

² *Vom Erhabenen*; 1793; G., 10, 151.

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sion of human experience. Schiller appreciated this point for he asserts that it matters little from what stratum of society the tragic character be taken as long as he be capable of forceful self-expression. Baseness is not necessarily concomitant with humbleness of rank: a slave or person of low degree may be as capable of noble self-assertion as a king and if so, the former is as worthy of being the subject of tragedy as the latter.¹ *

Fifth. The drama must portray a single situation. The limitation of time tended to make French drama one of a single situation. While in the Shakespearian tragedy there is a gradual rising action, climax, falling action, and catastrophe, and character development, generally in its French fellow the play begins only shortly before the climax: it omits the gradual development of the situation, substituting narration for action, and either begins almost immediately with the turning point or crowds events in such a fashion that the French sin as much in their own way against dramatic verisimilitude as does Shakespeare in his.² In his essay, *Ueber die tragische Kunst*, Schiller expresses the feeling that tragedy demands more fullness and completeness of treatment than the French drama gave it, that threads of human will and fate, which lead up to tragic results are longer in spinning than the conventional twenty-four hours of French dramatic theory.³

The preceding five principles are the backbone of Schiller's criticism of French classic dramaturgy. Later he

* Lessing, following Diderot's example in France, had instituted the middle class tragedy in his *Miss Sara Sampson*, in 1755 (Schmidt, *Lessing*, 1, 300ff). Schiller also employed this type of drama in *Kabale und Liebe* in 1783 (Kühnemann, *Schiller*, 226ff). It is interesting to notice, however, that in most of his subsequent dramas—*Don Carlos* (1786), *Wallenstein* (1799), *Marie Stuart* (1800), and *Die Braut von Messina* (1803)—he reverted to the general practice of the Greeks and to the demands of the French, and chose his tragic personages from the highest ranks of society.

¹ *Gedanken über den Gebrauch des Gemeinen und Niedrigen in der Kunst*; 1802; G., 10, 213.

² Cf. Corneille's *Cid* and *Horace*, and Racine's *Phèdre* and *Andromaque*.

³ *Über die tragische Kunst*; 1792; G., 10, 35f.

touches upon other points, some of them of lesser importance, but his later statements can all find a basis in the general attitude which he adopts in his literary and philosophical essays.

While the German dramatic poet re-wrote his *Wallenstein* in rhymeless iambic pentameter and thus definitely conformed to the ideal of verse for tragedy,¹ he feels that the French alexandrine arranged in couplets destroys the fullest appeal of verse and satisfies the intellect alone: "Die Eigenschaft des *Alexandriners* sich in zwey gleiche Hälften zu trennen, und die Natur des Reims, aus zwey *Alexandrinern* ein *Couplet* zu machen, bestimmen nicht bloss die ganze Sprache, sie bestimmen auch den ganzen innern Geist dieser Stücke, die *Character*e, die Gesinnung, das Betragen der Personen. Alles stellt sich dadurch unter die Regel des Gegensatzes und wie die Geige des *Musicanten* die Bewegungen der Tänzer leitet, so auch die zweyschenkligte Natur des *Alexandriners* die Bewegungen des Gemüths und die Gedanken. Der Verstand wird ununterbrochen aufgefordert, und jedes Gefühl, jeder Gedanke in diese Form, wie in das Bette des *Procrustes* gezwängt."²

In 1799, Schiller's interest in French dramatic and histrionic art is further aroused by Humboldt's instructive letter from Paris.³ Like Goethe, Schiller had been urged by the Duke to translate French pieces for the Weimar stage⁴ and this letter cheers him to the task. The aim of this translation of French classic pieces for the German theater, he sums up in his poem, "An Goethe, als er den Mahomet von Voltaire auf die Bühne brachte." In it, he first expresses mild surprise that Goethe, who has freed the Germans from the shackles of the "rules," is now sacrificing to the French muse; he feels, however, that his friend, by this innovation, has no intention of putting German drama back under the thrall of French dramaturgy. Real art can be born only in free souls

¹ Letter to Cotta, Nov. 14, 1791; J., 5, 286; cf. above, ⁴³~~45~~ (footnote).

² Letter to Goethe, Oct. 15, 1799; J., 6, 96.

³ Cf. above, p. 524.

⁴ Köster, Einleitung zu *Phädra*, Schillers Sämtliche Werke, Säkular-Ausgabe, 10, vif.

and not under a despotism such as dominated the period of Louis XIV. Not eloquence but truth to nature is the aim of art. Passion must be portrayed. Beauty must spring from the truth of a drama and not from its form alone. Although French classic drama never attains the height of real art, its elevation, harmony, order, and charm may serve excellently as an antidote for the crass naturalism of the then German stage as ruled by Kotzebue and Iffland. In conclusion, he sums up the whole purpose of the translation of French pieces by saying:

“Nicht Muster zwar darf uns der Franke werden,
Aus seiner Kunst spricht kein lebend'ger Geist,
Des falschen Anstands prunkende Gebärden
Verschmäht der Sinn, der nur das Wahre preist,
Ein Führer nur zum Bessern soll er werden,
Er komme wie ein abgeschied'ner Geist,
Zu reinigen die oft entweihte Scene
Zum würd'gen Sitz der alten Melpomene.”¹

The French prided themselves on being heirs of the ancient classic dramaturgy, but instead of being the perpetrators of pure classic tradition, they have become its pharisees. In a letter to Goethe in 1797, Schiller points out that they have missed the spirit of the ancients in a desire to follow the letter of dramatic law. Even Aristotle, whom they recognized as final dramatic authority, was far more concerned about the content (Wesen) of the drama than about the outer form. He believes that Shakespeare with all his laxity is nearer the spirit of the author of the *Poetics* than are the French.² He proceeds unmercifully against some of their reasoning. He shows how fallacious is their demand for an action in a play whose prototype in actual life shall not exceed the “two hours’ traffic of the stage.” The French declared that it was ridiculous to represent on the boards the whole life of an individual: that demands too great a stretch of imagination on the part of the spectator. Schiller reminds them, however, that the daylight and the architecture—and he might have said the location—on the stage are not real, but artificial, and that the metrical language is not that of even the most edu-

¹ *An Goethe*, etc.; G., 11, 325.

² Letter to Goethe, May 5, 1797; J., 5, 188.

cated persons. Why, then, insist that, in the midst of all this illusion, the action alone be so like actuality that it will not tax the imagination?¹

This is the position he takes in 1803 when he attempts a piece—*Die Braut von Messina*—in the classical style. He feels deeply how eminently untrustworthy are the French in their interpretation of the Greek spirit. He scores them for having done away with the ancient chorus,—with the Greeks it had added to the concreteness of the drama—and having substituted therefore “die charakterlose langweilig wiederkehrende Figur eines ärmlichen Vertrauten.”² He shows how the Greek drama had taken its rise from the chorus; and holds that this lyric element gave the ancient drama its elevated tone and is the only justification for such a tone. The French have attempted to imitate the dignity of the Greeks, but, having cast aside the chorus, this dignity becomes forced and unnatural.³

Even in this period when Schiller is conforming his own dramatic production to some of the limitations of classical tradition, he maintains a very frosty attitude toward the French drama.⁴ True, in 1802 and 1803, he works over Picard's two comedies, *le Moyen de parvenir* and *Encore des Ménechmes* into *Der Parasit* and *Der Neffe als Onkel*, and later, in 1805, he translates Racine's *Phèdre* but with greater reluctance than Goethe did Voltaire's *Mahomet* and *Tancrède*.⁵ It was an irony of fate that some of the last work Schiller ever did was that on *Phèdre* when one sees the severely critical attitude which he maintained toward French classic drama throughout his literary career.

To sum up: Schiller, brought up in school in a French atmosphere, and nurtured in French ideals received no vital impress from any typically French element in the drama:

¹ Einleitung zu *der Braut von Messina*; *Über der Gebrauch des Chors in der Tragödie*; 1803; G., 14, 7.

² Ibid, 7f.

³ Ibid, 10f.

⁴ Letter to Sophie Mereau, Mar. 1802; J., 6, 370; to G. Körner, Jan. 20, 1805; *ibid*, 7, 206; conversation with Charlotte von Schiller, Dec. 15, 1803; P., 369; and other references.

⁵ Köster, Einleitung zu *Phädra*, 10, vii, f.

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whenever he leaned toward ideals for which the French stood (verse, characters of exalted rank, unities of time and place), he was drawn to them by laws arising from the nature of the drama itself as it had naturally developed in the practice of the Greeks. With two exceptions,¹ he never gave the French classic drama unqualified praise, and for the most part he showed himself out of sympathy with it. Because of the intellectual elements of dignity, harmony, and order, he grudgingly accepted it for the Weimar stage in lieu of the more distasteful naturalistic drama prevalent in Germany.² In this foreign *genre* he found no emotional truth—except in the one case of *Cinna*,—only one tragic conflict of a high type—in the *Cid*,—and no great characters. In short, Schiller felt that the French drama was essentially an intellectual product with an appeal to the head only.³ Because to the Germans, perhaps above other nations, the element of human feeling is not only as important and as worthy to be depicted as the intellectual element, but also is the very source of art, Schiller was right in saying that on the whole, for them, the French drama lacked depth.⁴*

* In his essay, *Ueber die tragische Kunst* (1792), Schiller enunciated most fully his theory of tragedy. In a word it is this: Pleasure in tragedy arises from witnessing, between the moral man and his sensuous self, a keen struggle in which the higher nature, the moral dignity of humanity, eventually comes off victorious. To produce such pleasure, tragedy must portray *motived* and *present action*, not unrelated events, past action, nor fleeting emotional states. This conflict must be bitter and the suffering of the tragic hero great and fully apparent to the spectators so that the final victory may be the greater. It was because he held such a point of view, that he saw in French dramaturgy a superficial interpretation of the laws of dramatic production.

¹ *Rheinische Thalia*; 1784; G., 3, 516; *Ueber die tragische Kunst*; 1792; *ibid*, 10, 26.

What he appreciated in *Cinna* and the *Cid* was nothing that was characteristically French.

² *Tag- und Jahreshefte* (Lesarten); 1804; W., I, 35, 313.

³ *Über den Grund des Vergnügens an tragischen Gegenständen*; 1792; G., 10, 16.

⁴ Letter to Goethe, Apr. 25, 1805; J., 7, 239.

IV

SCHILLER'S ATTITUDE TOWARD FRENCH CLASSIC DRAMATISTS
IN PARTICULAR

Corneille. Of the French classic dramatists, Corneille received most attention from Schiller, but that attention was mostly derogatory criticism. The German dramatist found the work of the Frenchman typical of the striking general weaknesses of French tragedy. Schiller cites Corneille many times to illustrate how the French had failed to understand not only the nature of dramatic art but even the spirit of the ancient dramatic pieces. It is apropos of Corneille's works that Schiller was impressed, as early as 1781, with the need of a drama portraying by present action, and not by narration, the conflict of passions and ideals, and presenting the spectacle of visible and natural tragic suffering. He compares the theatrical pose of Diego, in the speech beginning, "O rage! ô désespoir!" (*Cid*, I, 4) as the old man realizes that he is too infirm to avenge his honor, with the simplicity of Macduff's cry, "He has no children" (*Macbeth*, IV, 3) when the old warrior learns that the king has murdered his family. Schiller is convinced that Corneille was incapable of reading the human heart and of giving expression to real emotion on the stage.¹

In 1796, in a *Xenion*, he pokes fun at the "divine Peter." Like that King Salmoneus of old of whom we read in the *Aeneid*, who presumptuously aped Zeus, the thunderer, and was hurled into Tartarus for his rashness, Corneille had tried to ape genius but had been consigned to the realms of oblivion and punishment for his presumption.²

In a letter to Goethe of May, 1799,—hence but a short time before the arrival of the famous Humboldt letter from Paris—Schiller attacks some of Corneille's most famous pieces with a savageness at least equal to, if not exceeding, that of Lessing in the *Dramaturgie*. After reading *Polyeucte*, *Pompeé*, and *Rodogune*, he leaves scarcely a timber standing in the structure of these plays and is no less severe in regard to their spirit: "Ich bin über die wirklich enorme Fehlerhaftig-

¹ Erste Vorrede zu *den Räufern*; 1781; G., 2, 4.

² *Xenien*, 1796; *Schriften der Goethe-Gesellschaft*, 8, 54.

keit dieser Werke, die ich seit 20 Jahren rühmen hörte, in Erstaunen gerathen. Handlung, dramatische Organisation, Charaktere, Sitten, Sprache, alles selbst die Verse bieten die höchsten Blößen an." Schiller thought that Corneille was the initiator of French classic drama and that many of his defects must be charged to the immaturity of the art form. Even this, however, can not suffice to excuse all his many faults. The German dramatist found nothing happily treated except the heroic element and even this—a rather scanty ingredient—monotonously handled. His pieces were characterized not only by poor taste but also by poverty of invention, lack of imagination in the treatment of character, coldness of emotions, stiff and halting action, and a lack of the interesting throughout.¹

This is the most drastic and sweeping criticism that he makes of any French classic dramatist. As we have seen, most of these defects he feels in all French classic drama.²

To Schiller's mind, the characters in Corneille have the same flaws as are inherent in French tragic personages in general: they lack naturalness and full-bloodedness. They are cold-blooded spectators of their own emotions, blasé psychologists of their own sensations.³ Self-forgetfulness is not one of their virtues: they are not real men and women struggling without consciousness of self against odds opposing them, but show-figures fully aware that they are on parade, consequently never failing to act in a very dignified fashion.⁴

In contrast to these severe criticisms, there are only a few passages in which he is at all appreciative of this French dramatist. Only twice does he give him unqualified praise: in 1784, he was enthusiastic over the scene in *Cinna* (V, 3) where Augustus, the Emperor, shows his magnanimity to the conspirator, Cinna. Schiller felt this scene worthy to illustrate how the theater may stir to great-hearted action;⁵ and in 1792, he felt that the situation in the *Cid* was interesting

¹ Letter to Goethe, May 31, 1799; J., 6, 35.

² Cf. above, pp. 543, 551.

³ Cf. above, p. 543.

⁴ Cf. above, p. 546.

⁵ Cf. above, p. 544.

and of a very high tragic quality because it represented a conflict between different kinds of equally justifiable duties. From this point of view, he considered this drama the masterpiece of the French classic tragedy; in fact, as far as the complication of the plot was concerned, of all tragedy.¹ It should be noted that these points which aroused Schiller's enthusiasm were not elements of form characteristic of French dramatic art but were situations which might have appeared in the drama of any nation.

Outside these two statements of appreciation, then, Schiller's attitude toward Corneille's work is, in general, cool, sometimes contemptuous. His criticisms were directed in part against defects inherent in French tragic manner—the conventionalized, blasé, self-analytical characters, the demand for perfect drawing-room manners on the stage at the cost of truth, the lack of any intense tragic suffering, and the declamatory style—and in part against defects in the poet himself—poverty of invention, and the monotonous treatment of the heroic element.

Molière. Schiller has no feeling of spiritual kinship with Molière such as Goethe felt. We have seen that the latter esteemed the French comic playwright as a genius of the very first rank, and appreciated him for his consummate artistic skill and his uncorrupted humanity.² Schiller, however, has the least to say of Molière of any of the French classic dramatists. He bestows upon him neither great praise nor great blame.

Schiller probably became acquainted with the works of Molière in Stuttgart.³ But there is no record to show what pieces they were nor how they impressed him. Throughout all his writings he mentions but three of Molière's comedies: *l'École des femmes*,⁴ *le Tartuffe*,⁵ and *l'Avare*.⁶ He speaks

¹ *Über die tragische Kunst*; 1792; G., 10, 26.

² Cf. above, p. 533.

³ Berger, 1, 99.

⁴ Letter to Goethe, Mar. 20. 1802; J., 6, 372.

⁵ *Über das gegenwärtige deutsche Theater*; 1782; G., 2, 341; *Tragödie und Comödie*; Nachlass; G., 10, 544.

⁶ *Rheinische Thalía*; 1784; G., 3, 518.

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of the French playwright as one who portrays types rather than individuals.¹ While he appears to classify the French classic poets as "sentimental," he speaks of Molière as expressly a "naive dramatist."² In the essay, *Ueber naive und sentimentale Dichtung*, in expressing the opinion that the comic poet, whose genius draws most of its material from actual life, is most exposed to becoming insipid, he asks "mit welchen Trivialitäten quälen uns nicht Lope de Vega, Molière, Regnard, Goldoni?"³

The *Tartuffe* Schiller criticised as not being a comedy. A character like the hero who always excites disgust is not adapted to the merriment demanded of comedy. The genius of comedy had abandoned Molière when he wrote this drama.⁴

I have found no direct statement of appreciation of any of Molière's works, although Schiller seems to have thought *l'Avare* a great comedy.⁵

Racine. Schiller mentions only three of the pieces of this tragic poet: *Mithridate*,⁶ *Iphigénie*,⁷ and *Phèdre*.⁸ Although he speaks once in actual disparagement of Racine's art⁹ and is only faintly laudatory of the *Mithridate*,¹⁰ he is most attracted to him of any of the French dramatic poets—which, to be sure, is saying little. Recognizing the effeminacy of Racine and seeing in him all the defects of the French manner, he still feels this man's works to be unquestionably nearer the dramatic ideal than those of his co-laborers on the French classic stage.

In 1803, Schiller gives in to the wishes of the Duke and

¹ *Dramatische Preisaufgabe in Propyläen*; 1800; G., 10, 540.

² *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (footnote); 1795; G., 10, 453f.

³ *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*; 1795; G., 10, 497.

⁴ *Tragödie und Comödie*; Nachlass; G., 10, 544.

⁵ *Rheinische Thalia*; 1784; G., 3, 518.

⁶ Letters to Goethe, Jan. and Jan. 17, 1804; J., 7, 110 and 115.

⁷ *Anmerkungen zu Iphigenia in Aulis*; 1788; G., 6, 229.

⁸ Conversation with L. v. Wolzogen, 1797; P., 282; letters to Iffland, Jan. 5, 1805; J., 7, 199f; to Cotta, Jan. 18, 1805; *ibid*, 205; to Körner, Jan. 20, 1805; *ibid*, 206; to W. v. Humboldt, Apr. 2, 1805; *ibid*, 227.

⁹ Letter to Goethe, May 31, 1799; J., 6, 35.

¹⁰ Köster, *Schiller als Dramaturg*, 267.

looks through some French pieces with a view to translating them for the Weimar stage. Director Goethe was also anxious to gain pieces for his repertory which should serve the Germans as models in the matters of form and manner.¹ With a view to meeting both these wishes Schiller chose *Phèdre*.^{*} Because of its many points of merit, Schiller worked on it carefully and sympathetically as a play not unworthy to be transplanted to the German stage.² He criticised Racine's *Iphigénie* for being on a lower ethical plane than Euripides' drama of like name. Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon, is to be sacrificed to appease the gods so that they will grant the Greeks favorable winds for the expedition against Troy. In Euripides, Achilles, out of human feeling pure and simple, intervenes and saves the girl from her fate, while in Racine Achilles is the lover of Iphigenia and rescues her from death for selfish reasons. This substitution of a love motive for one of broad humanity lowers the tone of the piece and by so much does the French drama fall short of the tragic seriousness demanded by the Greeks.³ Undoubtedly this is one of the points which Schiller had in mind when he declared Racine to be on the whole weak.⁴

Voltaire. When Schiller became acquainted with Voltaire as a dramatist, it is hard to say. In a letter to Goethe, May 31, 1799, he says, "Nun bin ich in der That auf *Voltaires Tragödie* sehr begierig, denn aus den *Critiken*, die der letztere über *Corneille* gemacht, zu schliessen, ist er über die Fehler desselben sehr klar gewesen."⁴ From this it would seem that he knew none of Voltaire's dramatic works until 1799, about the time when both Goethe and himself were casting about them to see how they could comply with the wishes of Karl August. On the other hand, as we have seen, he expressed a desire back as far as 1784 to translate French pieces—among them Voltaire's—for the Mannheim theater⁵—which might

^{*} He also started a translation of *Britannicus* in 1804 but got no farther than the first scene. Köster, 269.

¹ Köster, *Schiller als Dramaturg*, 271.

² Letter to Iffland, Jan. 5, 1805; J., 7, 199f.

³ Anmerkungen zu *Iphigenia in Aulis*; 1788; G., 6, 229.

⁴ Letter to Goethe, May 3, 1799; J., 6, 35.

⁵ Letter to Dalberg, Aug. 24, 1784; J., 1, 207.

imply that he was acquainted with them. Again, in 1793, in his essay, *Vom Erhabenen*, etc., he says that the kings, princesses, and heroes of Corneille and Voltaire never forget their rank even in the most violent suffering.¹

All in all, however, it seems very probable that Schiller knew Voltaire as a dramatist as early as 1784 and certainly by 1793, in spite of his apparent ignorance in 1799 of what he was like.

He mentions the dramatist Voltaire nine times;² of these references, four are general, four are to *Mahomet*, and one to *Tancrède*, i. e., the plays which Goethe translated. He first refers by name to one of his plays (*Mahomet*) in October 1799, and the last mention of Voltaire's tragedies is in December, 1800—the two years when Goethe was translating *Mahomet* and *Tancrède*, and he himself Racine's *Phèdre*. In spite of this paucity of attention to Voltaire, he agrees with Goethe's choice of these pieces for the Weimar theater—if French pieces are to be given at all—because of the interest of the first and its freedom from the unpleasant French dramatic manner,³ and because the second will serve the dramatic purposes well, which Goethe and Schiller had in mind, and will give another play in the more elevated theatrical style which they were trying to graft on to the German stage.⁴

Considering the fact of Schiller's education in the ducal military academy of Karl Eugen, of Goethe's knowledge and appreciation of Voltaire as a dramatist, of the prominence of Voltaire⁵ both as publicist and author of tragedies, of Schiller's knowledge of the Frenchman's version of the story of the Maid of Orleans,⁶ and of Schiller's supposedly wide

¹ Cf. above, p. 546.

² *Vom Erhabenen*; 1739; G., 10, 151; *An Goethe als er den Mahomet von Voltaire auf die Bühne brachte*, 1800; G., 11, 322ff; letters to Dalberg, Aug. 24, 1784; J., 1, 207; to Goethe, May 31, 1799; *ibid*, 6, 35; same, Oct. 15, 1799; *ibid*, 95; same, Oct. 18, 1799; *ibid*, 99f; same, July 26, 1800; *ibid*, 176; to Iffland, Dec. 18, 1800; *ibid*, 230; to Goethe, Apr. 25, 1805; *ibid*, 7, 239.

³ Letter to Goethe, Oct. 15, 1799; J., 6, 95.

⁴ Same, July 26, 1800; J., 6, 176.

⁵ Goethe in conversation with Eckermann, Jan. 3, 1830; B., 4, 186f.

⁶ Letter to Wieland, Oct. 17, 1801; J., 6, 308.

knowledge and catholic appreciation of all dramatic literature, his neglect of reference to Voltaire strikes me as unaccountable.

In his last letter to Goethe, Schiller criticises his friend's estimate of Voltaire in the *Anmerkungen zu Rameaus Neffen* as follows: "Freilich wird es schwer sein dem *Voltaireischen Proteus* einen *Character* beizulegen. Sie haben zwar, indem Sie *Voltaire* die *Tiefe* absprechen, auf einen Hauptmangel desselben hingedeutet, aber ich wünschte doch, dass das, was man *Gemüth* nennt und was ihm sowie im Ganzen allen *Franzosen* so sehr fehlt, auch wäre ausgesprochen worden."¹

In Voltaire, then, as in the other French classic dramatists, he misses the element of true and deep feeling which goes into the make-up of a fully developed harmonious personality.

Minor Dramatists. Of the minor dramatists, Schiller mentions only Regnard and Crébillon. Of the latter's pieces, he refers only to the *Rhadamiste et Zénobie*, which evidently Goethe had thought for a while to translate for the Weimar stage. Apropos of this, Schiller writes his friend in March, 1802, "Gott helfe Ihnen durch dieses traurige Geschäft."²

Thus we can see that Schiller felt no spiritual kinship with the French classic dramatists as men and found only a modicum of value in their works. For him they have added nothing new of worth either to the drama as an art-form nor have they increased our knowledge of the workings of the human heart.

V

CONCLUSION

First of all, in comparing Goethe and Schiller as regards their attitude toward the French classic theater, let us note the *differences* in their opinion of it. We have seen that Goethe's life falls into four clearly defined divisions in regard to this great foreign dramatic literature. In contrast to this, Schiller's career offers no periods with their varying appreciations: excepting some exaggerations of statement in

¹ Letter to Goethe, Apr. 25, 1805; J., 7, 239.

² Same, Mar. 17, 1802; J., 6, 366.

the Storm and Stress years, his attitude was announced in the preface to *Die Räuber* (1781) and remained at bottom the same for the remainder of his life. Even the friendship of the two men, which brought a modification of the views of each in many other subjects, had, as far as I can discern, no effect on either in the matter of the French drama. Then again, it is especially worthy of note that, in the period of their activity as translators of French pieces for the ducal stage, while Goethe gained a more genuine and a more just opinion of French classic drama,¹ Schiller, although by the nature of the case forced to express himself more often about these foreign pieces, gave them a very qualified approval that revealed the same spirit as that of his earlier utterances.

Goethe was far more widely and thoroughly acquainted with this dramatic literature. In his first period, he had read all of Molière and Racine and a good part of Corneille. He mentions by name twenty-seven French classical pieces: of Molière, 10; Racine, 7; Voltaire, 5; Corneille, 3; and Crébillon, 2. Schiller on the other hand, nowhere mentions having read any French authors entire, although in 1784, he extended his knowledge of the French drama considerably. *In toto*, he mentions by name only fourteen: of Corneille, 5; Molière and Racine each 3; Voltaire, 2; and Crébillon, 1.

It is strange that Schiller as a dramatist should have known less of a great dramatic literature like that of the French than did Goethe, who was not so much of a dramatist as a lyric poet. Nevertheless, we must recall that Goethe was connected with the Weimar stage for twenty-six years as its manager, and we must also remember how much longer he lived than his friend, and how much more we know of his life and opinions—from the autobiography, diaries, conversations, a novel like *Wilhelm Meister* that includes much of Goethe's experience, and from a vast number of letters. Set over against this large amount of biographical material for Goethe, we have only the letters and a small volume of conversations for Schiller.

¹ Goethe's more sympathetic attitude toward French classic drama was undoubtedly induced in the last period by his hopes for a world literature. "Die Vorstellung einer Weltliteratur gewinnt für Goethe Bedeutung seit der Mitte der zwanziger Jahre." W. I., 42³, 491.

It seems, then, to be perfectly within the truth to say that Goethe was more lenient and catholic in his taste than Schiller. On occasion, he was as caustic in his comment as the younger man,¹ but he was also more willing to see the merits of the French drama.² Schiller adopted the scientific point of view in his criticism while Goethe was both scientific and impressionistic. There were only two things in French dramatic literature which thrilled Schiller, there were many which did Goethe. Schiller was interested in this literature as drama merely—he discussed its shortcomings as an art form and compared it very unfavorably with the Greek and with the ideal demands of dramatic art: Goethe, while he criticised it as a whole on some of the same points as Schiller—too strict interpretation of the unities and over-insistence upon form and not enough leeway to the genius of the dramatist,—looked behind some of the dramatic work to the personality of the author. Goethe saw in Racine a man very sensitive to the artistic, in Corneille a noble soul, and in Molière a great man and artist in whom culture and natural instincts had blended into an harmonious whole. Schiller mentioned none of these things: he says only that the dramatic characters of Corneille and Voltaire are too sophisticated, incapable of feeling deeply, and over-refined; while Molière is frequently trivial and makes but little appeal to him.

While Goethe was much more hearty in his estimate of French classic drama in general than Schiller, the greatest difference between the two men is seen in their attitude toward Molière. Schiller puts him aside with a few words: his *Tartuffe* is a failure as a comedy, being instead tragic in its treatment: his work is too realistic and for Schiller lacks seriousness. For Goethe, Molière, by his knowledge of stagecraft, belongs in the company of Shakespeare and the Greeks, and he esteems him highly for his rich personality.

Such are some of the differences in the attitudes of the two men toward French classic drama. Now let us notice some of the things in which they were alike.

¹ Cf. above, p. 516f.; *die Räuber*, I, 2; G., 2, 29.

² Cf. above, pp. 529f, 534 ff.

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They were alike in seeing in Greek dramatic art the supreme expression of dramatic genius because it combined dignity and significance of content with artistic form. In so far as the French had succeeded in attaining this dramatic point of view, the two German poets, in varying degree, appreciated them and found them of use in opposing an undignified art rampant in the Germany of their day. They were, however, of one opinion that a large part of the dramatic traditions of the French which the latter had supposedly taken directly from the ancients were unhistoric and undramatic. In regard to the French point of view they assumed an attitude which might be summarized under three heads.

First. The French had misinterpreted the spirit of Greek drama. Their theorists had taken the best usage of the Greeks, as noted by Aristotle, to be as unchangeable as an imperial fiat and had thought that to follow such formulae was to insure dramatic success. Goethe and Schiller saw that the laws practiced by the Greeks were not a Procrustean bed but were the natural form which their dramatic production assumed. Goethe, especially, pointed out that the unities find their *raison d'être* only in making a drama unified enough to be easily comprehended. If they become hindrances to comprehensibility, it is ridiculous to consider them so sacred that they can not in whole or in part be laid aside. He showed how even the Greeks did not always comply with them, for a good drama was more to them than the sanctity of any dramatic tradition. He concluded by saying, "Die französischen Dichter haben dem Gesetz der drei Einheiten am strengsten Folge zu leisten gesucht, aber sie sündigen gegen das Fassliche, indem sie ein dramatisches Gesetz nicht dramatisch lösen, sondern durch Erzählung."¹

Second. The French were at fault in considering themselves the only true interpreters of Greek dramatic usage. Goethe and Schiller attacked them for the position which they assumed that they alone had grasped the principles of Aristotle's *Poetics* and for not recognizing a piece as a true drama that did not follow their interpretation. The official inter-

¹ Conversation with Eckermann, Feb. 24, 1825; B., 3, 162f.

preters of French dramaturgy had quarrelled with Corneille over the *Cid* and forced him in subsequent dramas to shoulder the yoke of dramatic convention and consequently had stifled his best self. Goethe and Schiller in common with Lessing, held that, with all his laxness, Shakespeare is nearer the spirit of the Greeks.

Third. The French failed to recognize that genius may produce a drama with little regard to established rules. From the French point of view dramatic theory was deductive and dramatic art static: from the point of view of Goethe and Schiller dramatic theory was inductive and dramatic art evolutionary. Goethe, in discussing rules in art in general, said that nations and artists do not agree among themselves to consider some ridiculous convention as law in art but "sie bilden zuletzt die Regeln aus sich selbst, nach Kunstgesetzen, die ebenso wahr in der Natur des bildenden Genius liegen als die grosse allgemeine Natur die organischen Gesetze ewig tätig bewahrt."¹ Schiller acknowledged the same principle, i. e., the possibility of development in art, in his essay on tragedy in 1792. Here he laid down the principle that when art can portray the hero of tragedy as seeing in his own individual fate, not a blind, unfeeling necessity, but a small part of the good and great order of the universe, it has reached a higher development than tragedy had even among the Greeks. "Zu dieser reinen Höhe tragischer Rührung hat sich die griechische Kunst nie erhoben, weil weder die Volksreligion noch selbst die Philosophie der Griechen ihnen so weit voranleuchtete. Der neuern Kunst, welche den Vortheil genießt, von einer geläuterten Philosophie einen reinern Stoff zu empfangen, ist es aufbehalten, auch diese höchste Forderung zu erfüllen und so die ganze moralische Würde der Kunst zu entfalten. Müssten wir Neuern wirklich darauf Verzicht thun, griechische Kunst je wieder herzustellen, wo nicht gar zu übertreffen, so dürfte die Tragödie allein eine Ausnahme machen."²

Schiller also assumed the same attitude in practice when he strove to create a German drama, not one copied after the ancients, but one which should occupy a middle ground be-

¹ *Diderots Versuch über die Malerei*; 1798-1799; W., I, 45, 257f.

² *Über die tragische Kunst*; G., 10, 27.

tween the extremes of the French and the English theater. He shaped his drama to suit the temperament of the Germans, who demanded more life and emotional fullness than they could find in the French drama.

This evolutionary position of Goethe and Schiller may be looked at in another way. The hard and fast lines of French dramatic convention were part and parcel of a larger point of view, which suffused the entire life of the French people, namely, the feudalistic idea of institutionalism. From this point of view, the mass was the unit and the individual was a negligible quantity. Over this mass were a few persons or a single individual who did the thinking and feeling for the crowd. The individual's political thinking was done by the state, and his faith was dictated by the church: he had little autonomy. It was this same point of view pervading literature which gave the rules of French dramaturgy such authority. Once fixed they must be obediently and blindly followed, as Corneille had learned.

Lessing, first, had revolted against French authority in German letters in his *Dramaturgie* (1767), where he contended that the French had misunderstood and misinterpreted Aristotle. Goethe and Schiller* had based their disapproval of French practice very little upon the interpretation of theories but rather upon the usage of the Greeks, of Shakespeare, and upon their own instincts. They revolted against any imposition of arbitrary, outside authority in dramatic art. This point of view was an inheritance of the Storm and Stress movement which, under Herder's leadership, had boldly declared the freedom of German literature from the leading strings of any such authority. Goethe and Schiller outgrew, of course, the exaggerations of the "Geniezeit," but they always stood for the freedom of the literary conscience, for the liberty of the dramatic genius to form the rules for literary production from within himself. Although disturbed

* It is surprising that Goethe and Schiller have so little to say of Lessing and his liberation of German literature from French ideals. They both fully acknowledge his critical ability and his service (for Goethe's opinion, cf. letter to Oeser, Oct. 14, 1769; W., IV, 1, 205f; and conversations, 1809; B., 2, 107; for Schiller, cf. letter to Goethe, June 4, 1799; J., 6, 37), but the paucity of references makes their exact attitude toward him problematical.

by the license to which such a point of view led in a movement like the Storm and Stress and later in Romanticism, in their own theory and practice they represented a liberal democracy in literature.

Lastly, Goethe and Schiller felt that the French were slaves to their intellect and that it limited them in their appreciation of the totality of human experience of which the feeling is an essential part. To this characteristic they seemed to lay their failure to comprehend the spirit of the Greek drama. The beauty of their pieces was in form—harmony and regularity of verse, rhetorical language, and symmetry and clearness of the whole—and not in emotional truth or in ideas. After they had gone over a piece with their intellectual rule and callipers, if they found it wanting in any of the traditional requirements, they discarded it, whatever revelation of spiritual truth there might be in it. Schiller says, "Gleichgültig gegen den Inhalt werden diese (art connoisseurs like the French) durch die Form befriedigt. . . Diese Art Kenner suchen im Rührenden und Erhabenen nur das Schöne; dieses empfinden und prüfen sie mit dem richtigsten Gefühl, aber man hüte sich, an ihr Herz zu appellieren."¹ Goethe's criticism is pitched in the same key, "Die Franzosen bleiben immer wunderlich und merkwürdig . . . sie müssen erst alles was es auch sei sich nach Ihrer Weise zurechte machen. Ihr unseliger Respekt für den Calcül bornirt sie in allen artistischen, ästhetischen, literarischen, philosophischen, historischen, moralischen, religiösen Angelegenheiten, als wenn das alles dem unterworfen sein müsste. Sie merken gar nicht, dass sie hier auf die niederträchtigste Weise Knechte sind."²

In a word, then, since man is as truly part emotional as intellectual, and since those in whose veins Teutonic blood runs demand that art shall present the *whole* man, Goethe and Schiller, in their maturity, felt that French classic drama, despite artistic excellencies, lacked the power of bringing before our eyes human nature in convincing fullness and in its truest relations.

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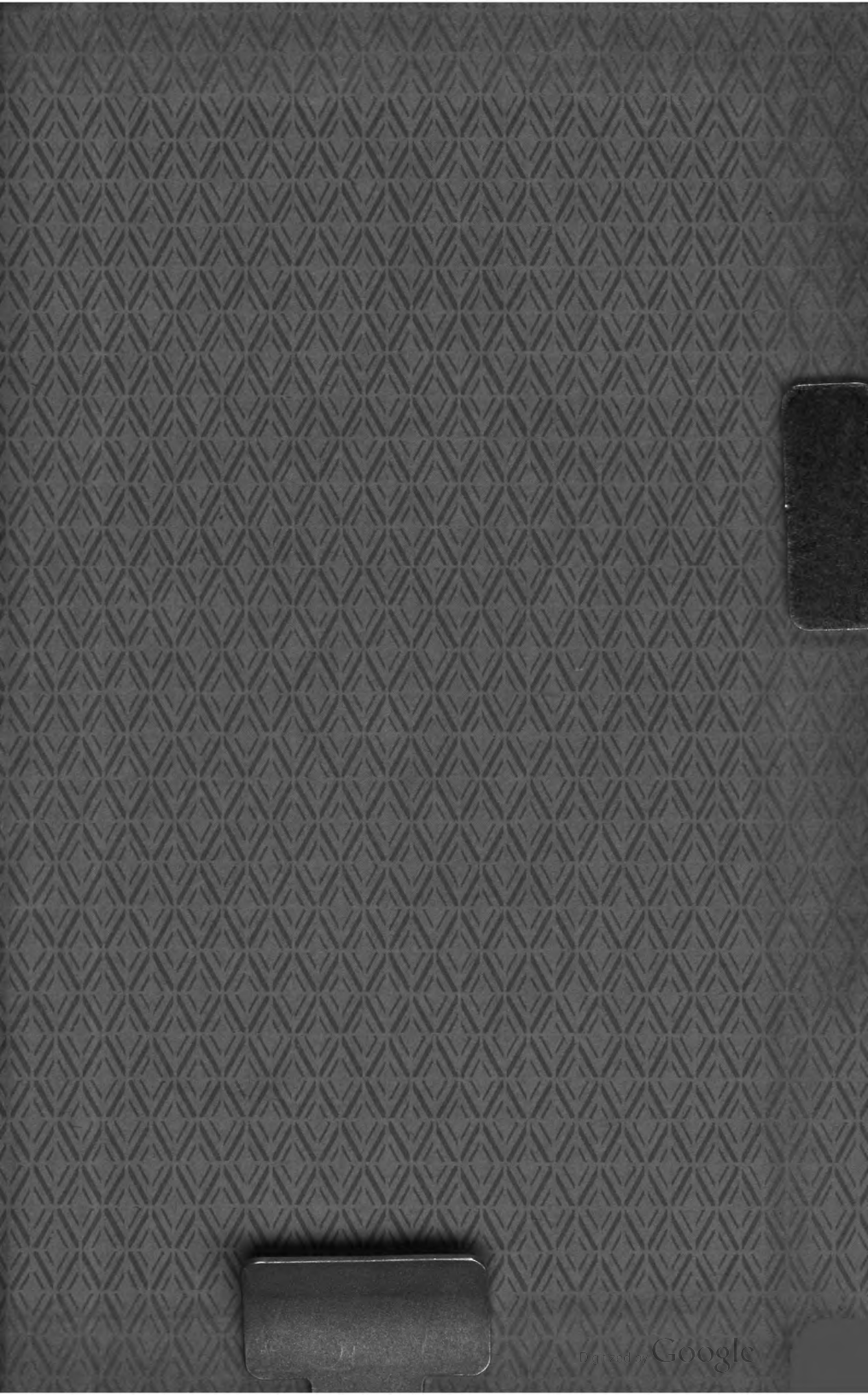
¹ *Über den Grund des Vergnügens an tragischen Gegenständen*; 1792; G., 10, 16.

² *Diaries*, June 7, 1831; W., III, 13, 86f.

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